

Obese 12-yr-old undergoes bariatric op, sparks debate

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: For the last four years, Mulund boy Rishi Shah (name changed) was adding more than a few chapattis to his plate: he was gathering 15 kilos on an average every year.

On Thursday, the 12-year-old's worried parents took a drastic step: 140-kg Rishi, who stands a few inches over 5 ft, underwent a bariatric surgery to lose weight.

Isn't Rishi a tad too young to undergo a surgery in which his stomach was reduced to about a fourth of its original size? Bariatric surgeon Abhay Agarwal of the Centre for Obesity Control in Malad, who operated on Rishi, feels the surgery was the only option left for him. "He would have reached 200 kg in a few years. He was the centre of discussion wherever he went, specially at school. He was becoming homebound most of the time," said Dr Agarwal, who counselled Rishi for six months before

the surgery. Moreover, he said, the boy felt breathless on walking and had breathing problems if he slept on his back.

Bariatric surgeon Dr Mufazzal Lakdawala advised caution. "Any teenager desirous of bariatric surgery should be

could give the entire field a bad name. "We should never operate on a person below 15 years. If the child has a body mass index of over 40 and has diabetes or hypertension, then a bariatric surgery could be the last option. But we should ensure that no part of his anatomy is cut," the doctor said.

Dr Agarwal defends his decision, saying that bone testing showed that Rishi's bones were mature. "His radiological age is 16-18 yrs," he added.

Bariatric surgeon Dr Ramen Goel, who heads Nova Surgery Centre's adolescent bariatric surgery programme, said, "Guidelines state that adolescents in the 13-18 age group who have had adequate bone growth can opt for the surgery. In individual cases, the surgery could be done if the individual has adequate bone growth." Dr Goel says the number of families seeking consultation has increased. "In the month since we set up, we have operated on three children."

POINTS TO NOTE

► Obese adolescents with a BMI of over 40 and having skeletal maturity can opt for bariatric surgery

► Girls achieve full bone growth by 13 years of age and boys around 15 years

► It's a major surgery and has risk of bleeding and infection

counselled for up to a year. Also, attempts should be made to try a reversible method such as gastric banding before taking up irreversible options such as sleeve gastrectomy."

Another surgeon who didn't want to be named said that operating on a 12-year-old