

# For texas man, bariatric surgery led to diabetes-free life

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Paul Garcia lost 200 pounds, quit diabetes meds and feels like 'totally new person.'

(HealthDay)—Paul Garcia, 54, came from a family that loved to eat. "We always had a lot of food at home, and whenever we ate, it was like a feast," said Garcia.

And he said his family's [food choices](#) weren't always the healthiest either. "My [eating habits](#) were terrible," he said. "We'd have lots of flour tortillas, beans and rice."

Over the years, Garcia's weight ballooned—to 430 pounds at his heaviest. He was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and put on insulin to bring down his [blood sugar levels](#). But he had such a hard time controlling his blood sugar, he said, that he went into a coma more than once. He also had several heart attacks and lost sight in one eye. His triglycerides, a bad type of fat in the blood, were over 2,000. Doctors recommend those levels be below 150, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

Garcia also came close to losing a foot. Though doctors told him that they might very well need to amputate his foot, the surgeons were able to save his foot but they did have to amputate two toes.

That proved to be a tipping point.

"I'd been diabetic for 15 years," Garcia said. "I didn't want to lose my feet. I knew I had to change or I would die."

Change wouldn't come easily, however. Garcia said that his doctor, who'd heard that gastric [bypass surgery](#) could successfully treat diabetes, initially suggested it. But first, to ensure that he was a good candidate for the drastic [lifestyle changes](#) required after the surgery, Garcia's doctors enrolled him in a six-month nutrition program to help people learn to control their eating. He had already lost some weight on his own and was down to 370 pounds when he started the nutrition program. After six months, he was down to 320 pounds—a clear sign that he was making the necessary changes.

Besides the [nutrition program](#), Garcia said, his health-care team also recommended a 12-step program for [food addiction](#).

"It's like being an alcoholic," Garcia said. "Our thinking gets us into this situation, and that's why they have the 12-step program with the surgery, so you learn to deal with your thoughts."

Once he had the surgery, in May 2011, he said that changes began happening immediately.

"My sugar levels came down drastically," Garcia said. "I was on [insulin](#), but now I don't have to take any medications at all."

He now weighs 232 pounds and does 6 miles on an elliptical exercise machine every day. He's also been lifting weights and building muscles. His waist circumference, at 48 inches when he had the surgery, is now 36 inches.

"Exercise has really motivated me and changed my depression," Garcia said. "It was hard having so many issues with my health."

When first diagnosed with [type 2 diabetes](#), Garcia's hemoglobin A1C levels (a measure of [blood sugar](#) levels for the previous two to three months) were 16 percent. Someone without diabetes generally has levels below 6 percent. His last A1C was 5.6 percent. And, his [triglycerides](#) were down to normal, at 133.

Garcia said he's still very careful about what he eats. He tries to stay away from meat and processed foods. A typical day's diet begins with a protein drink and a banana, followed by a salad for lunch and a Portobello mushroom quesadilla for dinner.

"It's a big adjustment and a lot of hard work," he said. "You have to be committed. You can't just think that the surgery is going to be a miracle."

But he said the hard work has been worth it.

"I feel like someone just turned the lights on," he said. "I had a glaze in my eyes, but in the last four months I can see everything clearly again. I feel like a totally new person."

**More information:** Find out more about weight-loss surgery's effects on diabetes, [here](#).

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