

Beating bulge in dignified fashion

GREG STOLZ

STOMACH reduction surgery is booming as thousands of Queenslanders who packed on the kilos during COVID go under the knife in a desperate bid to fight the flab.

Bariatric surgeries across the state say they are performing dozens of operations a month on everyone from tradies to teachers, with demand for their services up as much as 30 per cent. They say the pandemic not only helped pile on weight but also gave obese people more time to reflect on the potentially deadly health risks they faced.

Gold Coast-based Weight Loss Solutions Australia chief executive Felicity Cohen said her practice performed al-

most 100 operations last month.

"It's been our busiest month ever ... we're seeing a 30 per cent increase in inquiry," she said. "For many people, healthy habits such as exercise and eating a balanced diet took a back seat during the pandemic and 'COVID kilos' became a real issue.

"It also made people more introspective and aware of the weight they had gained, and the dangerous health risks associated with morbid obesity."

Ms Cohen said her practice had patients from as far as Mount Isa and the Gulf as many obese people realised they could not lose weight by diet and exercise alone.

"About 97 per cent of diets and weight-loss programs fail,

whether it's within a year or five years," she said. "They're often setting up people with significant BMIs (Body Mass Indexes) for failure and a terrible roller-coaster of yoyo dieting."

Ms Cohen said stomach reduction surgery, once considered radical, was now widely accepted as overweight people confronted health consequences of obesity including diabetes, sleep apnoea, high cholesterol, anxiety and depression.

The most popular bariatric surgery - sleeve gastrectomy, where the stomach is reduced by about 85 per cent - costs \$24,000 and was "no more complicated than having a gall bladder removed", Ms Cohen said.

After surgery, a clinical team including dietitians and psychologists works with patients for 12 months on a "lifestyle modification program".

Ms Cohen said the operations were "saving lives and changing lives".

Gold Coast computer technician Richard Smedley, 62, said he weighed 200kg three years ago and could barely walk 50m (inset top).

But since having bariatric surgery, his weight was down to 95kg (inset bottom) and he had taken up running, salsa dancing and jetskiing.

"My life is so totally different ... I can do things that I couldn't have considered a few years ago and I'm having a lot of fun doing them," he said.

