

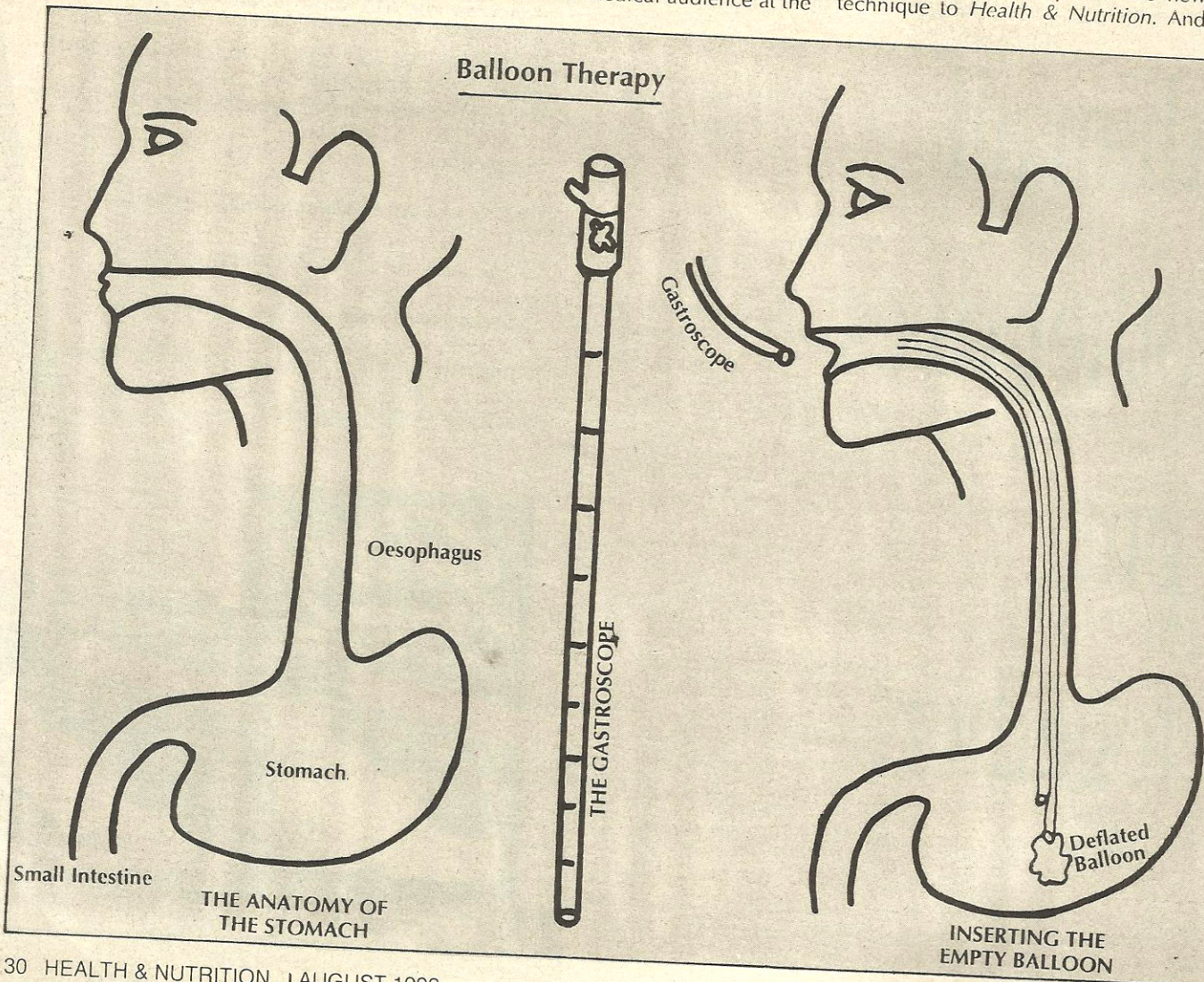
# NOW — A balloon to lose weight!

**W**ITH HINDSIGHT, it seems such a simple notion, you wonder why no medical scientist thought of it till now. The one who did was general surgeon Ian Mclean Briad of the University of Cambridge. His "New Balloon '92" technique, tried out on 500 overweight patients at Guy's Hospital, London, had them losing, on average, 7 to 12 kg. in a period of four to five months. And all they

had to do was eat till they felt full. Ah, thereby hangs a tale of trimness. Briad's method worked by artificially creating a feel-full sensation in the stomach long before it could reach the point of calorie overload. In effect, his patients ate less since they reached the point of satiety much earlier than they normally would.

Briad's results were announced to a very interested medical audience at the

recently-held 7th European Congress of International Plastic, Aesthetic and Reconstructive Surgery in Berlin. Questions flew fast and furious, Briad had all the answers, and several surgeons left convinced, and vowing they would add this new weapon to their arsenal in the continuing war against obesity. Among the attendees was Indian cosmetic surgeon Vijay Sharma, who reported the new technique to *Health & Nutrition*. And



## BLOW IT UP—AND SLIM DOWN!

here it is, in its astounding simplicity:

In classically obese people, the stomach size is generally larger than normal, and this is one of the factors (there are many) that cause them to overeat and to put on excess weight. How to subdue this urge to over-indulge without leaving the person gastronomically dissatisfied? Briad's technique uses three very simple aids: a gastroscope (an instrument inserted via the mouth, down the throat

and the foodpipe and into the stomach—it enables the doctor to view the g-i tract through an attached viewer at the outer end); a length of fine tubing; and a silastic balloon. The deflated balloon is attached to one end of the tubing which is then introduced into the stomach via the gastroscope. (See illustrations). Once in place, the balloon is filled with normal saline or distilled water (both of which are bio-compatible, so even if there is accidental leakage there is no risk of harm to body tissues). The balloon has a self-closing, one-way valve, which prevents the fluid from emptying out.

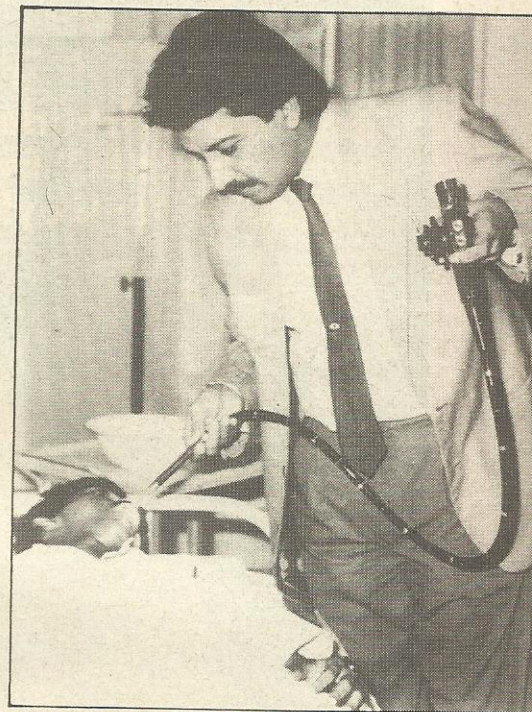
By taking up part of the volume of the stomach, the inflated balloon in effect decreases the size of the stomach. Voilà—a feeling of fullness sets in on a smaller serving! Weight loss is virtually guaranteed.

The technique has had precursors, though in the area of cancer treatment, not obesity. In stomach cancer patients, for instance, surgeons have sometimes carried out a *partial gastrectomy*: cutting away part of the stomach. In the case of cancer of the small intestine, part of the intestine is removed, which has the effect of reducing the absorption of food. In both these surgeries, it has been found that patients subsequently ate less and lost weight. Now, for the first time, the technique has been modified so as to enable overweight patients to derive its side-benefit without having to undergo surgery.

Sharma himself has already tried the technique on two Indian women, one a woman pilot, the other a housewife. The pilot lost 150 gm. in the first two days, and eventually 5 kg. in 6 weeks.

Medical observation and follow-up testing (haemoglobin count, urine protein, urine sugar and other routine indicators) are required, cautions Sharma, initially about twice a week, and later once a month.

Once the client has achieved her ideal weight (in relation to her height), the balloon can be deflated and removed.



The idea is to provide the initial thrust of encouragement to those frustrated weight-watchers who have decided that they're "never going to lose weight". And the hope is that, once conditioned, over a period of about half a year, to take in less food, the person will continue this change of dietary habit even after the balloon is out.

Theoretically, though, the balloon can be left in for as long as one likes. In fact, it's such an innocuous intrusion there's a real risk that its advantages could be abused. Our lady pilot, for instance, has decided to keep it in place for the six months prior to the airline's medical tests and then, having passed the tests, to remove the balloon and gorge for the next six months!

Of course, not everyone could afford this extravagant practice: the silastic balloon itself, being imported, costs around Rs.9000; the medical procedure, consultations and follow-up could run up bills between Rs.5000 to Rs.7000, says Sharma.

The balloon technique is a particularly good option, he adds, for those who are so overweight that liposuction would not be a practicable treatment. One sitting of liposurgery could safely remove two to three litres of body fat; some patients may need to lose upto 40 litres.

The only contraindications for the procedure, says Sharma, would be a stomach disorder, peptic ulcer, cancer of the stomach or a previously-operated stomach—all of which can be ruled out at the time the gastroscopy is done.

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