

Weight management course makes the grade

By JONI STRANDQUEST

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During the school year, Karin Waldrop, 39, a first-grade teacher at Clyde Elementary, admits difficulty eating right and exercising.

Her days begin at school around 7 a.m. and she leaves work at 4 p.m. with stacks of papers in hand to grade at home in the evening.

"It doesn't leave a lot of time to take care of myself," she said. "I believe women in general, particularly nurses and teachers, tend to be caretakers and caregivers. We put the needs of other people first."

Waldrop, who said she's had a problem with her weight for the past decade, said her extra pounds went on during the period she was working on her master's degree and shortly after she got married.

"My life got frantic," she said. "With weight gain, it's easy to go month after month and procrastinate. I kept saying 'I'll start on Monday.' Addressing this was a mental shift. I got to the point where I knew that another six months would go by and I'd still be in the same shape — or even put on more pounds — if I didn't take action."

Waldrop is working hard to break old habits. But she's doing it with success and support.

she'd lost about 10 pounds. By mid-September, Waldrop shed more than 20 pounds total and continues to lose about a pound a week.

"Learning to eat more fruits and vegetables has had a positive impact," she said. "I've lost weight and I feel much better. I even stayed healthy with a classroom full of kids with strep throat."

Although she and her husband go hiking in the Smoky Mountains or Fisgah National Forest most weekends and regularly enjoy whitewater kayaking, the sporadic exercise wasn't enough to help her lose weight.

"Since RLWM, I try to do some type of physical activity every day," she said. "At the fitness center I really like the group classes. There's such a wide variety of choices, and it encourages me to do exercises I wouldn't normally do on my own — like stretching and aqua aerobics."

Waldrop belonged to a typical, chain fitness center when she lived out of state, but the Jonathan Creek area resident said she much prefers the ambiance of the Haywood Regional Health and Fitness Center.

"I love it," she said. "There's such a diversity of people and it feels like a more natural setting in which to exercise," she said. "There's everyone from people in therapy, recovering from surgery or illness, to well-defined athletes. It's easy to stay motivated."

Waldrop learned about the



Joni Strandquist photos

Karin Waldrop works out at the Haywood Regional Medical Center Health and Fitness Center. In the left photo, she had dropped 10 pounds after participating in a Real Life Weight Management class she started in April. At right is a September photo where she has lost 25 pounds.

"In addition, you get ideas from your classmates and the weekly meetings keep you motivated and on track.

"I don't feel like I'm on a diet because there's no forbidden foods. I've learned that everything is a choice."

Waldrop measures her results weekly.

"Success comes down to the choices we make and taking responsibility for those choices."

Waldrop tracks her fruit and vegetable intake by turning it into a game of one-upmanship with her husband. They aim for eating at least 35 servings a week and tally it daily.

"We used to eat the same foods repeatedly, but now we're trying some new things," she said. "Eating so

a health educator at the HRMC Health and Fitness Center, the Real Life program was piloted on HRMC employees in 2005 and began being offered to the public in January.

"Real Life has weekly goals, incentives and is discussion oriented," Hilger said. "We use incentives with our employee wellness program to support behavior change and decided to include them in our weight management classes. So now, those who attend eight or more of 12 classes receive a complimentary personal training session."

Real Life participants in the spring session achieved a 46 percent increase in their physical activity minutes each week and lost an average of

it began being offered to the community.

Part of the program includes a 12-week discussion group.

The 12-week Real Life Weight Management series includes class topics customized to the specific needs of each group. General topics range from emotional eating to tips on reading food labels. Participants in the program can either receive a meal plan or use their own balanced plan.

The fee for 12-week series is \$132 for non-members and \$120 for Haywood Health and Fitness Center members. Those who sign up with a friend both save 15 percent off the series cost.

A free orientation will be held 5:45 p.m., Monday, Oct.