

Each Day, Healthier Together | 2010 Report to Community

Roberts couple moves beyond dieting to successful, sustained weight loss

This certainly wasn't their first attempt at weight loss. John and Kristi Kurkowski of Roberts may even have considered themselves dieting experts. The problem was, they were still overweight.

Kristi was, in fact, on a high-protein weight-loss diet when she spotted an informational brochure about the Healthy Habits for Life program offered by Hudson Hospital & Clinics. She took the brochure home to her husband, John, who had worked hard over the summer to lose weight after learning he had high cholesterol.

"I thought that it sounded interesting and could help us," Kristi says. "John was all for it."

The Healthy Habits for Life program is one of several classes, seminars and support groups that Hudson Hospital & Clinics offers members of the community to support lifestyle changes for optimal health. The program is available in group or individual settings.

One of the first things John and Kristi learned when they started the 12-week group program in November was that they didn't need a diet; they needed a lifestyle change, starting with the basics of cooking and exercise.

Under the guidance of registered dietitian Brittany Willard, the Kurkowskis met weekly with other program participants to learn, share ideas and support each other. Willard also completed comprehensive evaluations of each participant to determine his or her metabolic rate and establish safe and realistic milestones for losing weight.

For Kristi, a critical aspect of the program was a food journal in which she recorded everything she ate, along with details such as quantity, time of day and hunger level at that time. Willard reviewed the food journals each week to analyze nutritional values and offer suggestions and encouragement.

The first analysis of Kristi's food journal showed that she was eating twice the necessary amount of protein each day and far too much milk.

"It was hard at first, but it really helped," Kristi says. "I could make sure I was getting all the food groups and was more aware of foods I was getting too much of."

It helped, she says, that Willard was always energetic, upbeat and nonjudgmental. "I could be honest with her. She didn't judge, no matter how much someone had to lose."

Kristi also learned the power of eating and exercising for her own individual needs. "So many other diets and programs I had tried were based on an average person. But I didn't fit into the 'average' mold. My metabolic rate was much lower and I don't need as many calories as I was eating with other diets."

John, who is a longtime Hudson High School physical education teacher, said he appreciated the program's sensibility and credibility: "I'm a very detailed guy. I liked that the Healthy Habits for Life program made sense. It didn't feel like a diet. And it was a great thing to do with my wife. Watching each other lose weight was kind of cool."

And they have lost a lot of weight. To date, John has shed 21 pounds and Kristi took off 33 pounds. Kristi is buying new belts to cinch in her newly loose clothing, with plans to buy smaller clothes in the future when she's met all her weight-loss goals.

John sees the difference in how his students view him.

"What I've noticed is more students come up and want to talk and interact with me," John says. "It helps to look and feel good. They aren't saying 'Hey, you look great.' But they are more social. And that's important to me. How they perform as students is a reflection about how they are doing as a total person."

Willard says she's grateful the Healthy Habits for Life program helped the Kurkowskis succeed: "They were really eager to learn, so motivated and excited. Their kids got involved at home and, as a couple, they were really supportive of each other."

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Tips for life-long healthy habits

With full-time jobs and busy schedules around the activities of three teenage sons, John and Kristi Kurkowski sought weight-loss help from the Healthy Habits for Life program, an offering of Hudson Hospital & Clinics. Based on their new knowledge and experiences, they suggest the following tips:

- Healthy changes need to come from within. The program was an excellent guide for them. And supporting each other, as a couple, created built-in motivation. Still, their success came because they were each committed to it as individuals.
- Measure out food serving sizes until you know the size by heart.
- Shop less, but make it count. The Kurkowskis researched new recipes and enjoyed the challenge of finding smart ingredients at the grocery store. They found it was fun to be together, strategize about meals and just chat about their day.
- Exercise alone. With their incredibly busy work and tag-team kid activity schedules, John and Kristi each had to carve out a time for fitness. Kristi now gets up a 5:20 a.m. and works out to an exercise video. John finds time to hit the treadmill. As John says, “A chunk of time to call your own in the day is good.”
- Find new favorites. For recipes, they gravitated toward Jillian Michaels’ seafood recipes and sauces.