

# A STEP AHEAD OF DIABETES

Changing lifestyle habits can be difficult, especially when it comes to your health.

But Allen and Sheryl Tjelmeland of Ely did just that – and enjoyed it. By learning to eat healthy foods in appropriate portions and exercise regularly, they may be able to prevent developing type 2 diabetes.

This spring, Allen Tjelmeland, 67, decided to get a health check-up.

“I hadn’t had one for 20 or 30 years,” Allen explains, so he figured it was time. The results surprised him.

“I found out I was borderline diabetic and my cholesterol was high,” he says. “I didn’t want to progress to diabetes, taking shots all the time.”

Allen and Sheryl both had parents who were diabetic. So, Allen followed his doctor’s suggestion to check with the Mercy Diabetes Center on how to manage his pre-diabetes.

People with pre-diabetes have blood glucose levels that are higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. There are no clear symptoms of pre-diabetes. But, according to the American Diabetes Association, you can lower your risk for type 2 diabetes by 58 percent by losing 7 percent of your body weight (15 pounds if you weigh 200) and exercising moderately (brisk walking) 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

Allen and Sheryl signed up for Mercy Diabetes Center’s four-week, pre-diabetes classes in April. The four one-hour sessions provide information about pre-diabetes, related health conditions, nutritional recommendations for portion control and food choices, physical activity guidelines and resources for continued education and support.

Allen quit smoking cigarettes 15 years ago

and gained 40 pounds. He was a home builder until 2001, when he became an estimator on construction jobs – an office job. Allen considered himself fairly active, playing a lot of golf and some baseball and basketball with his grandkids.

Mercy’s pre-diabetes classes showed otherwise.

“We talk about making their own exercise program, working on muscle strength, stretching, cardiovascular work-outs,” explains Holly Kepros, Mercy exercise specialist. “Weight increase and inactivity pair with diabetes development.”

The small classes enable easy interaction and participants share ideas and goals. “It’s kind of like a small support group,” Holly says.

Denise Scheer, one of the Mercy dietitians who leads the classes, explains the importance of checking weight regularly, keeping food journals, counting

calories and learning about healthier food options.

“The people we see want to be here. We’ve had five- to 20-pound weight loss over those four weeks,” Denise points out. “You want to make it a permanent lifestyle change. By taking small steps, behavior changes may be more effective than medication.”

The Tjelmelands were in for some big changes. “I’m Czech,” Sheryl explains. “We were eating food such as fried meat, gravy, potatoes, corn and high-calorie desserts.”

“I’m Norwegian,” Allen adds. “And I would use lots of butter and sugar.”

Allen’s typical day used to be coffee for breakfast, a pop and a bag of chips for lunch and

**“It takes the worry out of your mind.”**

*Allen Tjelmeland  
Mercy Diabete Center  
class member*



Allen and Sheryl Tjelmeland’s dog enjoys regular walks as part of the couple’s commitment to making healthier choices to prevent diabetes.

a large, heavy supper – plus a large bowl of ice cream before bed. “The CalorieKing Calorie, Fat, & Carbohydrate Counter,” a book the Tjelmelands bought at Mercy Diabetes Center and now call “the Bible,” helped them learn about alternate and healthier food choices.

“I had never counted a calorie in my life,” Sheryl explains. “This book helped us to read labels to check for sodium and sugar levels and look for low-calorie foods.”

Today, their meals include smaller portions, stir fry and grilling for supper, lots of salads and small tortilla wrap sandwiches for breakfast and lunch. Allen’s kids gave him a bicycle for Father’s Day. He rides three or four miles on evenings when he doesn’t go for long walks. Both Sheryl

and Allen credit Holly and Denise with inspiring them through their class.

“Am I glad I went with him to those classes,” Sheryl says. “They make it so interesting and it was really fun.”

Allen adds, “We got a lot of good input and ideas for food and eating habits. We learned a lot.”

Allen has lost 32 pounds. He no longer needs an antacid for heartburn at night. He hopes to lose eight more pounds.

“I feel healthier. I don’t get tired as quickly as I used to. It takes the worry out of your mind,” Allen says. “That’s the best money we’ve ever spent to learn how to cook, exercise daily and find out what’s good for you.”

For more information about pre-diabetes education, call Mercy Diabetes Center at (319) 398-6711