



National Diabetes Prevention Program Success Story: Dr. Kate Merrill and Patient Steve Jurgensen

Dr. Kate Merrill, a family practice physician in Astoria, has always screened her at-risk patients for prediabetes, but until recently, she didn't have an effective resource to help them once they were diagnosed.

"The only way to prevent prediabetes from progressing to full-blown diabetes is through lifestyle changes," Merrill says. *"But doctors simply can't deliver intensive lifestyle counseling during a 15-minute office visit."*

Now, however, providers can refer their prediabetic patients to a lifestyle change program called the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP). Covered by the Oregon Health Plan, Medicare, and some private insurers, National DPPs are available in a growing number of cities across Oregon, and also online. Recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the 12-month, evidence-based intervention has been shown to reduce patients' risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart attack, and stroke through a curriculum that focuses on healthy eating, moderate physical activity, and stress reduction.

In February 2019, the program launched in Astoria, where Dr. Merrill has referred several patients, including Steve Jurgensen, 61, a retired electrician, who was diagnosed with prediabetes during his annual checkup last year. Steve signed up with his wife, Dottie, who, while not officially enrolled, has participated as Steve's support person. During the first four months, they each lost seven percent of their body weight, and have gradually worked up to walking 30 minutes five times per week. Importantly, during his last checkup with Dr. Merrill, Steve learned that he has reversed his prediabetes and improved his overall health.

"This new way of life is a keeper in our book," Steve says. *"I want to stay active for as long as I can, and continue to enjoy the activities I'm interested in, like hiking. We've learned that there are plenty of dietary options that are healthy and very tasty."*

The Jurgensens attribute their success, in part, to the program's social support. During the first six-month phase, participants meet once a week in a small group facilitated by a lifestyle coach. Group members hold each other accountable to their goals. During the next six months, groups meet at least once a month—in Astoria, for instance, twice a month—and discuss, among other topics, how to maintain healthy habits in the face of obstacles.

Dr. Merrill believes that Steve's changes will stick. *"He feels like he has control over his life in a positive way, and he just acts like he feels better about everything in general,"* she says.

Learn more about how to refer your prediabetic patients to a National DPP by visiting theOMA.org/SteeringTowardHealth