



YMCA initiates new diabetes prevention program

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The La Crosse Area Family YMCA plans to start a new diabetes prevention initiative this spring aimed at reducing the incidence of the disease in the community.

The initiative is a group-based lifestyle program especially designed for people at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It is funded by a grant from YMCA of the USA as part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Diabetes Prevention Program.

The YMCA is recruiting people who have pre-diabetes or are at risk to receive healthy lifestyle classes and a free four-month Y membership.

Bill Soper, CEO of the La Crosse Area Family YMCA, said using organizations such as the Y for these programs can save lives and health care dollars.

"The lifestyle choices learned ... also create lifelong changes in the way that individuals approach health and well being," Soper said.

The program's goals are to reduce and maintain individual weight loss by at least 7 percent and increase physical activity to 150 minutes a week, said coordinator Sarah Moxness.

Trained lifestyle coaches will help participants in the 16-week program learn skills such as healthy eating, physical activity and other behavior modifications, Moxness said.

After the initial sessions, participants will meet monthly for up to a year for added support in maintaining lifestyle changes, she said. The program is expected to begin in April.

Jill Fleming, a lifestyle coach and registered dietitian who will teach some of the classes, said she likes the program goals.

"We'll stress nutrition, exercise, stress reduction and lifestyle change," Fleming said.

The program is the latest effort of the YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities. La Crosse is among 64 communities in the nation in Pioneering Healthier Communities, aimed at the public health challenges of obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition.

"The YMCA isn't only swim lessons and basketball," Moxness said. "We're entering the realm of chronic disease prevention and that is really exciting."