



February 7, 2011 – Grand Rapids, MI

## Muscle

The heart is the single most important muscle in your body. It has to work 24 hours a day for every day you're alive. At this point, that's about 80 years if you take care of yourself. And it gets to rest a whopping two-tenths of a second if you're sitting comfortably and a whole lot less if you're exercising at maximal levels. Think about contracting your bicep three times a second for a 30-minute workout. Not going to happen, and yet your heart does that with no problems.

The reason is the unique structure of heart muscle. Skeletal muscle such as in your bicep or sternocleidomastoid are long tube-like structures that are put together in bundles. But in the heart, each cell splits and connects to other heart cells. The weaving effect allows for better contractility when the heart has to beat; the heart can beat as a single unit to be a more effective pump.

When you exercise, you're training those cardiac muscle cells in your heart to beat more effectively and pump more blood with less effort. That's why the first effect of exercise is a reduction in heart rate and can take place within a week of your first exercise session. How cool is that?

But how can the heart beat as a single unit? That's because it's a nerve cell as well. That's the topic for Wednesday's message.

What are you prepared to do today?

### *Dr. Chet*

P.S. Look down at your feet. The sternocleidomastoid muscle is the one that helped you do that. Starts on the clavicle and attaches to the mastoid bone. When you look down or when you look side to side, that's the muscle that helps to that. It's so important, it even has its own syndrome.

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