



March 19, 2011 – Grand Rapids, MI

## Life Expectancy

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the latest statistics on life expectancy and mortality for the year 2009. We're living longer than we ever have before and we're dying later. That's good if you favor longevity, but it also presents us with some challenges. In this message, I'm going to take a look at some of the numbers in the latest report.

### The Highlights

Babies born in 2009 can expect to live to an average of 78.2 years. Females still have the longevity edge—80.6 versus 75.7 for males. That's up about 0.2 of a year or 73 days more than 2008's stats.

The mortality rate (death rate) also declined; 2,436,682 people died in the U.S. in 2009—36,336 fewer than in 2008. That's a 1.5% decrease.

Deaths from specific diseases declined. Fewer people died from heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory diseases, stroke, accidents/unintentional injuries, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, influenza and pneumonia, septicemia, and—news bulletin—even homicide.

Those are the highlights that got all the media attention and well they should. We're living longer and dying later. That sounds funny because it seems like it's stating the obvious, but here's the difference. Life expectancy focuses on how long a baby born today will live. The death rate applies to those of us who are already here. So who is dying and more importantly, how long can you expect to live? Let's check the details.

### A Closer Look

The complete report breaks down life expectancy and mortality by age groups. So which age group has the highest death rate? Surprise: those 85 and older with 30% of all deaths in that age group. Right behind were those 75-84 at 25.7% of total deaths. Another way of looking at that is that well over half the people who die are old. It sounds odd to say that but it's good to know that, for the most part, the people who die are the oldest in a population.

Everything wasn't all rosy. Two age groups experienced a significant increase in mortality. Mortality increased from 7.5% in 2008 to 7.7% in 2009 in those 45-54 years old. Even worse, those 55-64 saw an increase from 11.9% to 12.4%. That happens to be my demographic and I can tell you, I'm not happy about that. Baby Boomers: has this gotten your attention yet?

### One More Statistic

The statistics on mortality are sobering. Face it, we want to live as long as we can. But I think, more than that, we want to live as well as we can as long as we can. Here a couple more numbers from the study.

- If you're a 50-year-old man, you can expect to live another 29 years.
- If you're a 50-year-old woman, you can expect to live another 33 years.

- If you're a 60-year-old man, you can expect to live another 21 years.
- If you're a 60-year-old woman, you can expect to live another 24 years.

That doesn't sound too bad but let's get to the primary issue: what type of life will you have if you live that long? Around 75% of us in that demographic are overweight, prediabetic, and hypertensive with elevated serum lipids. What will life be like if we actually live that long?

## The Bottom Line

I close every speech the same way: Health is a choice. Choose wisely. The choices we make today, whatever our age, will determine what our 70s and 80s will be like. If we choose poorly, we might be alive but will be living life? Odds are many of us will eventually be dependent on medications and machines and caregivers to keep us going, but wouldn't it be great to put that off as long as possible and make our time in that situation as short as possible?

If we choose wisely, we put the odds in our favor that we will be able to live every day we're alive and spend a greater percentage of those days being active, not just waiting to die. It's not a complicated formula: regular exercise, a healthy diet, stress relief, and relying on our doctors' care to help us be as healthy as we can be—because let's face it, the older we are, the more health challenges we face and the more important it is to stay up to date with our medical and dental care. There are no guarantees, but I've got about 22 years coming yet and that's where I'm putting my efforts. I hope you will, too. It all depends on one thing today and every day:

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

**Reference:** [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr59/nvsr59\\_04.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr59/nvsr59_04.pdf)

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