



December 31, 2011 – Grand Rapids, MI

Health Goals for 2012

I asked you earlier in the week to spend time working on your health goals for 2012. Not your business, financial, family, church, or volunteer work goals—your health goals. There have been so many books written about how to set goals that nothing I could say would really add anything. But because health is my area, you need to understand what's reasonable and what's not. Then I'm going to tell you a story you better read. In fact, if you've never hit the Listen button to hear a Message, do it for this one.

Reasonable Health Goals

When you set goals, they have to be measurable and they should have a deadline. The only question is: what's reasonable? You're not going to run a marathon in 30 days if you haven't walked a mile in five years. You're not going to lose 50 pounds in a month. So what is reasonable? I can't cover every potential goal, but I'll hit the most popular.

Weight Loss

That's probably everyone's number one health goal. Most of us want to lose weight, and the safest amount is one to two pounds per week. Unless you're on *The Biggest Loser* where it's your 24/7 job to lose weight, one to two pounds is reasonable and safe—it's also doable. If you don't have a lot to lose, a half pound a week is fine. For those with a lot more to lose, three pounds is fine in the beginning.

Fitness

There are three different areas: aerobic fitness, strength, and flexibility.

Aerobic fitness is assessed many ways, but here are the simplest. The first is monitoring heart rate to a set workload such as a step test; as you get fitter, your heart rate will go down. The second is a timed walk or run. The fitter you are, the farther you should be able to go in the same time. How much can you expect to improve? Initially, 5 to 10% per month is normal, but the fitter you get, the less you can improve as you reach your genetic maximum.

Strength is usually assessed by how much weight you can lift in a bench press or squat or something like that. If you are consistent in training, you can expect to improve about 5% per month.

Flexibility is generally assessed by a test such as the sit and reach for hamstring and lower back flexibility. From the maximum point in any joint, you can improve about a half-inch per month.

Blood pressure and serum lipids are important but much more difficult to gauge. The goal should be to get to a normal reading in every category. I would discuss this one with your physician so that you're not trying to go overboard. If you had a total cholesterol of 300 mg per dl, it could take a year or longer to get under 200 mg/dl. The same may be true for reducing blood pressure through diet, exercise, and supplementation. Let your physician partner with you to set and achieve reasonable goals. What? You say you haven't seen your physician for a while? Hmm, time to make an appointment for your annual physical; you can't set a goal if you don't know where you're starting and where you should be.

The key for every health goal is simple: consistency. You can't do a tremendous amount for a week or two and then quit. You just have to do a little bit every day for the entire year.

Why You Have to Set Health Goals

About three weeks before Christmas, my mother-in-law told me she really didn't want to do any more physical rehab at the long-term care facility where she resides. She felt it was too irritating because they asked her to do more and more. I don't remember telling her anything about walking and getting to come home, but Paula had pointed out that if she could at least assist as someone got her into and out of the car, we could take her out and do more things, including coming home for short visits. Once that really sank in, coming home for Christmas dinner was a goal she set all by herself.

She called me that afternoon to tell Dad (who's nearly deaf and doesn't always get all the details on the phone) not to come to visit until a specific time; she was going to physical rehab. I was surprised that she decided to do it because she really seemed like she didn't want to. But I didn't know her goal at that time.

Over three weeks, she was able to train herself to walk enough to stand with some assistance, get in a car, and then stand to get out again so she could come home. I got trained on how to help her do that.

We all spent Christmas together in our home. As you can see in the photo, it was special to her, and I know it was for Dad, Paula, and me. She's setting more goals because she wants to do more.



The Bottom Line

Now here's the rest of the story: Mom is 87 years old. She had extensive muscle damage from a statin medication and hadn't walked in 14 months; when she first went to the long-term care unit, she needed total care and had to be picked up and moved to her wheelchair and back into bed. She's a controlled diabetic, has been overweight most of her adult life, and doesn't have complete control over her elimination system—that's a goal for 2012—and her memory isn't what it was. But she set specific, measurable health goals and reached them.

Ponder this as you think about whether you want to set health goals for 2012:

If an 87-year-old woman with those issues can set and meet health goals, what's your excuse going to be if you don't?

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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