



Goals

Setting goals for yourself is a powerful tool and an excellent way to make changes in your lifestyle or habits. Research over several decades shows that using goals is effective. Goals help you direct and focus your attention and efforts, energize you, help you persist in your efforts, and help you put your skills and knowledge to use. Here are suggestions for setting goals and making the most of them.

Choose goals that are moderately challenging. If goals are extremely difficult or too easy, you are less likely to stick with them.

Make your goals realistic.

- Choose something that you can actually do. It's easy to dismiss goals you can't possibly achieve.
- It may be more realistic to attack a very large change in stages, rather than try to change all at once.
- Set yourself up to succeed! Keep in mind the limitations of your particular schedule and situation. Going to the gym every day is a great goal, unless your other responsibilities make that impossible. In that case, it is just a frustration. "Exercise for 30 minutes five days a week" might be the perfect goal for your schedule and level of fitness.

Make your goals very specific. Include *what* you are going to do and also some kind of *time frame*. You are more likely to succeed if your goal is "I will do a 30-minute exercise DVD four times next week" than if your goal is "I will get more exercise."

Choose goals you can measure. How will you know when you have reached your goal? Set a goal that clearly states when you have met it. For example: *I will eat only one portion of dessert or sweets a day.* You can easily count the number of servings of sweets you have. This is a measurable goal. Be creative – there are a lot of ways to count or measure success. "I will be able to wear a smaller size of clothes" is one good way to "measure" weight loss.

One goal or several? There is some difference of opinion about whether it's better to focus on one goal at a time, or to attempt several goals at once. One recent study suggests that people working on several goals at once had more success than people focused on only one. Try it both ways and see what works best for you.

Make a commitment. You are more likely to succeed with goals you are committed to. Writing your goals down is one common way that people make their goals seem more real, more relevant and more permanent, and harder to ignore or forget. Make a formal written contract like the one on page HW-12. You can make a contract with yourself, or with another person who will help you stick to your goal. Keep your contract handy, so you can refer to it.

Identify your reasons and motivations for achieving this goal.

- This will reinforce and help focus your efforts.
- It may help to think of reasons for yourself (such as wanting to feel good, to be stronger or to have more energy) and also reasons for the people who are important to you (for instance, wanting to be a good example or role model, wanting your family or friends to do activities with you, or wanting to be around for your family.)
- Revisit your reasons frequently, and add to them whenever you can. For example, your initial reasons to lose weight might have been to look better and for better health. As you lose weight, you may find you have fewer aches and pains, or it is easier to climb stairs, and your clothes fit better. Those also are good reasons to lose weight – add them to your list!



What will be the challenges or obstacles to reaching your goal? How will you deal with them?

If you can anticipate some of the probable pitfalls in advance and have a plan to overcome them, it will be easier for you to reach your goal. For example, if your goal is to exercise three times a week but you tend to get bored, plan a variety of different activities. Swim one day, walk one day, and dance one day. Ask a “buddy” to go with you if it is easy for you to skip your activity when you are alone.

Go back and review your challenges and strategies often. You may find that some have been resolved, and that new ones have come up that need your attention.

Where and who are you now? Think about your current activities and behaviors, your own history of successes, your likes and dislikes, and life circumstances such as where you live and work, that are related to your goal. For example, answer these questions if your goal is to add more activity to your life.

- What activities have you done in the past?
- Did you ever walk for exercise?
- What activities do you like to do now?
- What activities can you start doing now on a regular basis?

Or, use these questions to come up with ones that refer to healthy eating or weight loss if those are your goals.

Don't give up. Expect that there will be times when you don't follow your plans or when you will not make much progress. This is a **normal** part of making changes.

Learn from your slips:

- Don't be hard on yourself; everyone slips. It will NOT ruin everything.
- Get back on track as soon as you can. Gained weight over vacation? Make your next meal a healthy one!
- What caused you to slip?
- How can you avoid slipping in the future?
- How can you better manage slips when they happen?
- Reassure yourself that you are not a failure just because you slipped.
- Talk to a supportive person.
- Focus on all that you have accomplished!

Have a plan. Many people find that a well-defined plan is the best way to reach their goals. Look at the example on page HW-11 and tailor it for your own use.