
Goal Setting for Behavior Change

“A goal properly set is halfway reached.” —Zig Ziglar

SMART GOAL COMPONENTS

Specific: State the desired outcome as clearly as possible, and target a specific area for improvement. This is the “who, what, where, when, which, and why” of your goal.

Measurable: Identify the ways in which you will track your progress, and be as specific as possible. This is the “how” of your goal.

Attainable: Start with small, achievable goals that can be easily broken down into specific steps that will help you to complete the goal. Then, as you meet those smaller goals, work up to intermediate goals and goals that are more difficult to achieve.

Realistic: Create a goal that you are both willing and able to accomplish.

Timely: Set a deadline or time for achieving your goal to help keep you motivated.

Changing habits to consciously improve your health is no small undertaking, and making the decision to change is just the first step. Actively thinking about and planning for change will help prepare you for the process and motivate you to stay on track.

When you’re ready to make a change, it is often helpful to set tangible goals. These goals can be short-term (daily, weekly, monthly) or long-term (6 to 12 months). When goal setting for behavior change, it’s also helpful to set goals that are SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely.

Examples of SMART goals

- I will walk at least five days per week in the evenings to lower my cholesterol.
- I will meditate for 30 minutes a day five times a week in order to lower my stress levels and blood pressure.
- I will make an effort to move my body for at least 15 minutes three days a week, increasing my time each week by five minutes until I reach 30 minutes per day. I will add an extra day every two to four weeks until I reach 30 to 60 minutes for five days a week.
- I will begin my bedtime ritual one hour before bedtime, which will help me fall asleep faster each night.
- Over the next month, I will start eating breakfast every day. For the first week, I will make breakfast (or prepare it ahead the night before) twice per week. In the second week, I will make breakfast three times per week. In the third week, I will make breakfast five times per week. In the fourth week, I will make breakfast every day.

To begin setting your own SMART goals, flip the page and fill in the information in the template provided.

SMART Health Goals

Patient Name _____ Date _____

SMART health goals are: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely

SMART health goal: _____

Does the goal require adding or eliminating a behavior? _____

What is the first step to accomplish the goal? _____

What is the start date, timeframe, or deadline for taking action? _____

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REFERENCES

1. American Council on Exercise. The science supporting the stages of change model. *Coaching Behavior Change*. 2nd ed. San Diego, CA: American Council on Exercise; 2019: 46-57.
2. Bailey R. Goal setting and action planning for health behavior change. *Am J Lifestyle Med*. 2017;13(6):615-618. doi:10.1177/1559827617729634