

# S.M.A.R.T. Goals for Better Health

## Goal Setting Is a Process

*I've got to lose some weight. I need to get some exercise. I should eat healthier.*

Think about all the times you've tried to make a change but it hasn't worked out. Why weren't you able to make it happen? While you may still be kicking yourself about a poor end result, too often it's the very beginning of the process that trips people up. Setting a clear-cut goal at the start is critical for a successful end result.

The process of setting S.M.A.R.T. goals is a practical technique for making positive lifestyle changes that stick. Wellness experts define S.M.A.R.T. goals as:

- **S** is for **S**pecific
- **M** is for **M**easurable
- **A** is for **A**ttainable
- **R** is for **R**ealistic
- **T** is for **T**imed

## Passing the S.M.A.R.T. Test

For a goal to be a S.M.A.R.T goal, it has to meet all five parameters.

### ✓ **Make Sure It 's Specific**

If your goal starts out fuzzy, it's hard to know if you've actually achieved it. Take a look at the following two goals. Which one is specific?

*I will lose 10 pounds.*  
*I will eat healthier.*

The weight loss goal is specific. You clearly establish how many pounds you want to lose.

"Eating healthier" is too undefined to pass the S.M.A.R.T. test. A goal like

*"I will have 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day"* contains specific details and makes the grade in the S.M.A.R.T. test.

### ✓ **Make Sure It's Measurable**

Measuring your progress is key to your success. Pounds lost are easy to measure by stepping onto the scale once a week. Distance walked or run is measurable and trackable. Food consumption is measurable but requires a little more effort to track of all the types of food you eat (or don't eat) throughout the course of a day. Keep a food



journal handy until reaching for that apple to snack on or having an extra salad serving becomes a daily habit.

### ✓ **Make Sure It's Attainable**

Losing 10 pounds or walking briskly to the office could be healthy, attainable goals for many of us. But if you set a goal that's not really within reach, you're likely to just give up on it. Your goal should challenge you but it should be something you really believe that you can achieve.

### ✓ **Make Sure It's Realistic**

A realistic goal is a one that is healthy and safe for your current state of health. Losing 7 or 8 pounds a month is a healthy, realistic goal for weight loss for most people: losing 7 or 8 pounds a week is not.

### ✓ **Make Sure It's Timed**

Every S.M.A.R.T. goal should have a stop and start date. These goals do that:

*I will lose 18 pounds in 3 months.*  
*I will be fit and ready to hike the Appalachian Trail 10 weeks from today.*  
*I will learn to cook a healthy lasagne in time for the family reunion in April.*

When creating a goal, try to keep it within a time frame of a few months. A goal whose end is years away, like "In 5 years, I will speak fluent Chinese", is likely to be forgotten.

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## Take Action Steps

Once you have refined your wellness goal to the point you're satisfied that it meets S.M.A.R.T. guidelines, identify some action steps that will enable you to achieve your goal. Action steps, just like goals, should be S.M.A.R.T. Think of them as baby steps to meeting your overall goal. If your goal is "I will lose 15 pounds in the next 3 months", your initial action steps might sound like this:

- Today I will buy a pair of comfortable, supportive walking shoes.
- Beginning tomorrow I will walk 30 minutes, 4 days a week at lunchtime.
- I will clear all junk food out of the pantry over the weekend.
- I will have fresh fruit or veggies for my mid-afternoon snack beginning next Monday.

Your action steps don't have to be etched in stone. They'll change over time as you get closer and closer to your goal.



## Get It Down on Paper!

Be sure to write down your goal and your action steps. Use your online tracking tool or buy a handy notebook to write down your goal and record your progress. By recording your goal and action steps, you will be better able to keep up with each accomplishment. Add your action steps to your calendar and cross out each item as you've completed it. It helps you remember what needs to be done and acts as a reminder of all your hard work.

Promise to hold yourself accountable to your action steps and wellness goal by tracking your progress regularly. Write your goal on a sheet of paper, then sign and date it!

Working on a wellness goal doesn't have to be a solo effort. Tell friends or family members about your objectives and ask them for support. Who knows? Maybe one of them will follow your lead!

By using S.M.A.R.T. principles, you can improve your eating habits, increase your physical activity or lower your risk for chronic disease. Just taking the time to craft a S.M.A.R.T. goal before you get started will keep you more focused and more invested in getting results. Record your goal and refer back to it regularly to check your progress.

