

Setting SMART Goals for Nutrition and Weight Management

Whether you work with a health coach or prepare for a healthy change on your own, goals play a vital role in your success. Changing nutrition and weight management habits is no different because having clear, short-term goals is like having a road map.

The SMART-goal model described here will help you think through and evaluate your plans to make healthy changes in your life.

What are SMART goals?

SMART goals are a method that can be used to make achievable improvements in many different areas of your personal and professional life. SMART stands for:

Specific. A goal needs to be well-defined and clearly worded in a positive statement. It should be narrow enough in scope to be used as a guide.

Measurable. Your goal should be measurable so that you have a way to track your progress.

Action-oriented. You are more likely to achieve your goal if it includes steps and actions you will take. That's why the "A" in SMART can also stand for achievable or attainable.

Realistic. Goals motivate us to grow and challenge ourselves. But they also need to be realistic. If you want to lose weight, start out with a smaller, short-term goal first, such as losing 1 pound every two weeks or 10 pounds in three months. This will feel more realistic and be easier to achieve.

Time-limited. You're more likely to reach a goal if it has a deadline or time limit because it gives you a clear target and helps you stay focused.

Regardless of your bigger health and wellness goals, you can use the SMART goal system to help you stay on track. And while SMART goals are very specific by design, try to focus on their intent, and know that the actual goals might need to be modified along the way.

What do SMART goals look like?

You can use the SMART goal-setting method as a tool for achieving almost any health or wellness goal. Here are a few examples of what SMART goals might look like for someone wanting to improve their nutrition habits and manage their weight.

- Starting tomorrow, I will eat one serving of fruit and another of vegetables daily for the next two weeks.
- Starting tonight, I will not snack after dinner from Monday to Thursday for the next four weeks.
- Starting tomorrow, I will increase my water intake to 32 ounces per day for the next two weeks.
- Starting today, I will keep a daily food diary on paper or use an app for the next three weeks.

It's vital to write down your goals, action steps, measurements, and time frame. Write them in a notebook or journal or enter them on your computer, tablet, or smartphone. You may also find it helpful to keep a copy of the week's goals in your wallet or another convenient place where you can refer to them easily.

Finding success with SMART goals

Reach your goals by building on your past successes and experiences. Think about what has and hasn't worked in the past and what might need to be different this time. For example, if avoiding bread was one of your previous weight loss goals and was not sustainable, a new SMART goal might instead involve reducing your consumption of bread.

Other tips to think about when setting goals are:

Make sure your goals connect to the bigger picture. Ask yourself how reaching your goal will impact your life.

Set no more than a few targeted goals. Trying to reach too many goals at once can become difficult and unsustainable for the long term. Consider one or two at a time to get started.

When goals become "easy," find ways to make them more challenging. You can also move on to another area of wellness while maintaining your new habit.

Pair your goals with a habit that's already established. This will help the new goal become part of your routine.

Consider the support systems around you that will help you reach your goal.

Anticipate challenges. You don't have to have solutions to all of them right now.

Finally, if your goal didn't work out as planned, that's OK. You can always create new goals that better fit your circumstances. Focus on being consistent and patient. Review your goals frequently to make sure they still match your bigger plan and modify them as necessary.

Your goals are your road map but they can also be your inspiration

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