

## Session 7: Goal Setting

### What is a goal?

A goal is something you'd like to reach or attain. It's something you're working towards often for personal gain, development, or promotion. The best goals are set out with this in mind, and aren't done to satisfy or impress someone else.

Many of us have lifetime or long-term goals (months or years). Examples include:

- Learn how to cook
- Write a book
- Walk 5 kilometers

Short-term goals tend to be more specific and can be achieved in a short amount of time (days or weeks). Several short-term goals will usually lead to a larger or long-term goal.

Examples include:

- Purchase cooking utensils
- Sign up for a Creative Writing class
- Being able to walk for 5 minutes

### What is goal setting?

Goal setting is a process that allows you to plan, organize and prioritize the steps that will lead you to your ultimate or long-term goal. Many of us have difficulty realizing our goals because they're not clearly defined.

#### A poorly defined goal:

Is discouraging  
Is overwhelming  
Decreases self-esteem

#### A clearly defined goal:

Is motivating  
Increases self-confidence  
Allows you to see progress

By taking the time to set goals for yourself and develop specifics around those goals, you're more likely to achieve them. Goal setting is particularly important for people with chronic pain or medical conditions. Goals can help you make lifestyle changes and to assist you in using strategies that will manage your condition.

Most effective are SMART goals:

**S**pecific  
**M**easurable  
**A**ttainable  
**R**elevant  
**T**ime-bound

Use the following guide and goal setting activity to help you set effective goals.

## Goal Setting 101

### Specific

Decide what you want or hope to achieve. Begin with a general idea, and move towards specific by adding details and defining your terms. The more specific the goal, the greater the chance of accomplishing it. Including specific numbers can help make the goal more *measurable*. Answering “the 5 Ws” can help make your goal more specific:

- Who is involved? Typically goals will center around you, but some will require you to work with others (e.g., dietitian, a walking partner, supportive spouse, etc.)
- What specifically do you want to accomplish? Is it concrete, specific, and can it be measured?
- Where will you do the work of striving for your goal? At home? At a gym? At the library?
- When will this happen? Establish a realistic time frame or deadline (more on this later, but for now think about the big picture). Consider the time frame, but also consider the time of day, and how often.
- Why are you setting this goal? What are the specific reasons and benefits of accomplishing this goal?

The details you come up with can be used to make action steps – smaller, more achievable goals that will guide you towards the end goal. These action steps should still follow the SMART guidelines.

### Measurable

Creating a measurable goal will make it easier to track your progress and recognize when you’ve reached your goal or when your goal needs to be re-evaluated. Whenever possible, use concrete numbers in your goals, and continuously measure and track your progress against this number. Ask yourself:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when I’ve accomplished the goal?

### Attainable

Ensure the goal you’ve set is one that you can actually achieve. This may be the hardest part of goal setting. Failing to set a goal that is truly attainable for you may cause you to become discouraged.

Begin by assessing your own personal limitations. Consider any obstacles you may face, and whether you’ll be able to overcome them. With any goal, there will be challenges. Is it reasonable to think you’ll be able to accomplish the goal in the face of these challenges? Be realistic about the amount of time you have to devote to your goals as well as your own personal background, knowledge, and physical limitations. If you don’t think you can reasonably achieve your goal given your current life situation,

set a new one that is attainable. It's a good idea to write down all the foreseeable constraints you face – this will help you develop a complete picture of the task.

Assess your level of commitment. Even if you think your goal is achievable, you must be committed to making the efforts necessary to reach it. Your goal and commitment level should match up. Be honest with yourself about the changes you're willing to make. Ask yourself:

- Are you prepared to make the commitment to reach your target?
- Are you willing to dramatically alter or at least adjust aspects of your life?

Take time to identify restraints or obstacles that may be part of the process. What will you need to do to achieve your goal? What obstacles will you face? Consider how you'll face and overcome these obstacles.

Your goal needs to be one you can achieve. Once you've considered the challenges you face and your level of commitment, adjust your goal if needed. If you conclude that it's not really a reasonable goal, consider revising it to fit your reality. If you decide your existing goal is achievable, you can move on to the next step.

## Relevant

Closely related to a goal's attainability is its relevance. The question to ponder here is whether this goal will be fulfilling for you as an individual? This is the time to revisit the "why" questions. Will this goal truly fulfill your desires or is there a different goal that is more important to you? Consider your other goals and circumstances, and consider how your goal fits with other plans in your life. Conflicting plans can create problems.

Adjust your goal for relevance. If you decide your goal is relevant and will work well with your other plans, it's time to move on to the last step. If not, go back and make some more revisions.

## Time-bound

Choose a time frame. Your goal should have a start date and a deadline. This will help you stick to the specific actions that you need to take and remove the "sometime in the future" mentality. If you don't set a timeline, there is no internal pressure to accomplish the goal, so it can often end up on the backburner.



Set benchmarks, especially if your goal is very long-term. Breaking your goal up into smaller goals can help keep it manageable and help you manage your progress. You can always go back and revise the goal and timeline as needed. Consistent progress means keeping one eye on today and one eye on the future. Within your time frame, ask yourself:

- What can I do today to reach my goal?
- What can I do over the next three weeks to reach my goal?
- What can I do over the long-term to reach my goal?

### Celebrate!

Remember to track important milestones along the way to your target. You can pair each milestone with a reward. Small incentives will help you stay motivated! Consider making a list of people and resources you'll need to help achieve your goal. This can help you be strategic about taking the steps you need to attain it.

### Motivate!

- Pick a physical activity – something that you enjoy doing
- Develop a recording system using cards, a notebook, a calendar, or a log
- Participate in physical activity with a friend/exercise buddy – part of your socialization
- Participate in community activities
- Associate your physical activity with daily activities (i.e., if you always watch the 6:00 news, place your exercise bike in front of the T.V.)
- Schedule exercise in your day
- Reward yourself for your accomplishments or goals achieved
- Think about all the benefits of exercise (*↑ energy, ↑ strength, ↑ flexibility, ↑ mood, ↑ sleep patterns, ↑ confidence, ↑ self-esteem, ↑ sense of well-being; ↓ pain levels, ↓ depression, ↓ stress, ↓ risk of developing stroke, diabetes, heart attack, osteoporosis*)

On the following pages, begin to develop your own personal goals. Your goal can be related to anything you'd like. If you're recovering from a cardiac event, a health goal may be a great place to start!

## Session 7: Goal Setting Exercise

Write down one general goal that you'd like accomplish:

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Now consider the criteria discussed on the previous page:

**Specific.** Consider:

Who?

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What?

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When?

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Where?

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Why?

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**Measurable.** Assign number values to your goal. How will you know you've reached your goal?

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**Attainable.** The most important reasons why I want to achieve this goal are:

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Some limitations that may prevent me from reaching my goal and ways to overcome them include:

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I would rate my commitment level to this goal as:

(low commitment) 0... 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 6... 7... 8... 9... 10 (highly committed)

Any other barriers that will get in the way of your goal? How will you overcome them?

Possible Barriers	Solutions

**Relevant:** Is this goal relevant to me? Is it realistic in my current condition (consider pain levels/tolerances/other responsibilities)?  **Yes**  **No**

**Time-bound:** The date that I want to achieve my goal by is:

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Some additional benchmarks for completing this goal include:

1. By \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_.
2. By \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_.
3. By \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_.

**Celebrate!** When I reach my goal, I will reward myself by:

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Now write out your goal statement using the individual details above to create a S.M.A.R.T. goal.

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