

## Setting Compelling Goals

### When It Comes to Weight Loss, Be Realistic

It may feel like if you aren't the one setting your own unattainable goals, someone else is setting them for you. Open a magazine, drive past a billboard, or turn on the TV and we are all bombarded with impossible standards of beauty and fitness. However unrealistic we know they are, it's hard not to feel like you're being compared to those lean models and that looking like them models would mean instant happiness. Then, we experience frustration when we can't meet these unrealistic standards, and as a result we abandon our weight loss plans entirely.

In contrast, setting yourself a series of attainable goals will help you see progress and feel a sense of achievement throughout your weight-loss journey. Most of all, be SMART in setting goals:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easureable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ied to a deadline

### Goal-Setting Strategies

A variety of tactics can help you set better goals. These same skills may also serve you well in business and in other aspects of your life!

- **Be Realistic:** Success builds confidence! Set yourself up to succeed by choosing goals you *can* achieve. Unrealistic goals lead to frustration, causing you to lose motivation and faith in yourself.
- **Be Specific:** Instead of saying, "This year I will start exercising." Try saying, "This month I will walk four times a week for 30 minutes each time." Or instead of saying, "I will eat less," try "I will eat half a sandwich at lunch instead of a whole one." Now you have distinct goals against which you can measure your progress.
- **Set Deadlines:** Examples: "This week, I will walk 3,000 steps daily, next week I will walk 4,000 steps daily." "By six months I will be walking 10,000 steps daily." "I will eat two fruits per day this week and three fruits per day by the end of the month."

Other effective strategies for setting goals include:

- Writing goals down and tracking progress in a journal
- Repeating your new behavior so it becomes a habit and takes less willpower (also known as conditioning)

*Adapted from content provided by J. Michael Gonzalez-Campoy, MD, PhD, FACE*



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- Visualizing your goal—act as if you have already achieved your goal and imagine the experiences and sensations surrounding it
- Dividing a long-term goal into smaller more manageable steps, for example:
  - Think in terms of the day’s resolution, not the year’s
  - Take things one day at a time, or even one minute at a time

With the last technique, you may find yourself managing urges in five-minute increments. These “mini-goals” can get you through the tough times.

## Recognize and Resist Urges

Urges to revert back to bad habits will come in waves, starting out small and building. This is normal, but you should still fight them rather than giving in to them and moving backwards in your progress. Here are ways to get through them:

- Ride out the urge—it will pass.
- Recognize high-risk situations that can lead to an urge.
- Have a series of coping skills to help you ride out the wave.

### *Emotional Eating: Identify Your Feelings*

You may not be able to identify the feelings triggering your desire to eat when you aren’t hungry, to overeat, or to eat all the wrong foods. All you know is that you “feel like chocolate.” What is making you feel this way?

Ask yourself, “What am I feeling right now?” Tired, bored, lonely, angry, anxious, depressed, ashamed, joyful, enthusiastic, etc. Once you are able to do this, you’ll be able to come up with actions that correspond to these feelings instead of eating, such as:

- If you are lonely, get out and be with other people.
- If you are bored, get involved in a meaningful project.
- If you are angry, forgive.
- If you are enthusiastic, channel your energy toward another activity.

## Anticipating and Overcoming Obstacles

Being prepared for obstacles and triggers will empower you—knowing what causes you to react emotionally will put you one step ahead of your food vices.

Write down your triggers or obstacles and the solutions you have for overcoming them. In the same way you have been measuring your progress, periodically evaluate your triggers and



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solutions as you start to adjust your lifestyle. Learning how to cope with, manage, or ignore obstacles is crucial for your success. You will be proud to see what you have overcome since the beginning of your journey!

### Rewards

Rewards are a great motivator and are also an excellent reminder to stay focused on your goals and not your weight. These rewards should not be food—identify what else brings you joy, comfort, and satisfaction and link them to the changes in your lifestyle and habits. This will reinforce your new habits and encourage you to follow them.

Reward yourself not just for doing something good but for avoiding something that moves you backward. For example:

- If you push the plate away with food left on it, reward yourself!
- If you go to bed without snacking, reward yourself!
- If you get 10,000 steps in a day, reward yourself!

Make a list of rewards that will motivate you—new music, a brief period of meditation, a massage, manicure/pedicure, a good book, a favorite activity, a phone call to a friend, a quarter in a jar... Be creative!

### In Summary

Have S.M.A.R.T. goals—Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, Tied to a deadline. Identify obstacles or triggers for bad habits, maybe even write them down, and reward yourself for overcoming them. Be creative and have fun making positive changes to your life!

