

It's that time of year where we start thinking about making some healthy changes in our lives. Creating and writing down a goal increases the likelihood that you will accomplish it. No matter how big or small your goal-whether it's losing five pounds, walking a mile or running your first marathon, making change requires planning and SMART goal setting.

Follow these guidelines to setting SMART goals and you will be surprised at what you can accomplish:

1. **Specific.** Your goal should be clear and easy to understand.
 - A common goal, "get healthy," is too general. There are so many ways to get healthy. How do you want to do it? Is it losing weight? Start exercising? Stop smoking? Break it down and it will be easier to manage.
 - Let's pick weight loss and make a SMART goal out of it together. For example, "I will lose weight."
2. **Measurable.** A goal to "lose weight" is not enough. How will you track your progress and how you will know when you have reached your goal? Making your goal measurable means adding a number.
3. **Attainable.** Before you can add a number, you have to know how high or low you want to go. It's good to 'shoot for the stars', but don't be too extreme. Likewise, a goal that is too easy is also not very motivating. Only you know your limits.
 - Let's take our goal above. What percentage is attainable for you? Research suggests that a 5-10% weight loss is attainable for most overweight people.
 - A measurable, attainable goal could be, "I will lose 7% of my body weight."
4. **Relevant.** Set goals that are important to where you are in your life right now. Don't set a goal that someone else is pressuring you to attain-that isn't very motivating.
 - Examine our goal so far. Does it seem relevant to you? If so, let's keep going. If you are not concerned about weight loss or this is not a good time in your life to focus on that, choose something that IS motivating to you.
5. **Time-bound.** Include an endpoint. Knowing that you have a deadline motivates you to get started.
 - Since healthy weight loss is about 1-2 pounds per week, set your deadline accordingly. For our example, we can use three months. "I will lose 7% of my body weight in three months."

Now we have a SMART goal! With a goal like this, it's a good idea to set a few more action-oriented SMART goals so that you have a game plan. Here are a few examples:

- I will walk five days every week for 30 minutes each.
- I will drink water instead of soda every day this week.

Becoming a better version of you starts by being SMART!