



SMART Goal-Setting

Many of us have set goals before, such as buying a home, saving up for a special trip, or getting a certain job. Goals help us stay focused as we strive to accomplish things that are important to us. When someone has chronic pain, though, the pain often overshadows everything and leaves a person feeling discouraged and helpless. It's very important for people with chronic pain to set goals for their treatment. According to Dr. Jeffery Rome of the Mayo Clinic, setting goals "helps divert your attention from your pain and provides an opportunity to think about your lifestyle and what you can do to better manage your pain".

For goals to be most effective, they should be as specific as possible. One way to organize your goals is to use the SMART system, where goals are:

- S** = specific
- M** = measurable
- A** = action oriented
- R** = realistic
- T** = time oriented

SPECIFIC goals have enough detail to give direction. That is, you can see the difference between achieving the goals and not achieving the goal. Isolate one specific thing you want to change or you want to do differently. "I will relax" is not a specific goal, but "I will practice muscle relaxation using a tape for 20 minutes each day" is specific.

MEASURABLE goals have guideposts by which you can see the goal being achieved. This can be amount of time, number of repetitions of a task, or any number of things. Some things are easy to measure (like exercise). Others are more difficult (like anger). One example of measuring a goal is "I will develop positive self-talk and use that in place of putting myself down. I will record negative messages and changes daily on paper."

ACTION-ORIENTED goals give us something to do. This is the activity that we will do to achieve our goal. "I will feel better" is not active. It is a passive statement. "I will stop reacting to bad drivers on Deerfoot Trail by using relaxation breathing every time I am cut off" is a specific and measurable thing that you can do. At this point you may not know all the things that you will do to achieve your goal as you need to learn some specific techniques. However, you can say that you will explore ways to achieve your goals. For example, "I will explore relaxation techniques to discover three different ways to decrease muscle tension."

REALISTIC goals are small enough to be achievable within a foreseeable period of time. Aiming too high can be defeating. This does not mean you cannot challenge yourself, it just means that you take the intermediate steps toward a long-term goal first. Remember that our dreams give us direction and tell us a lot about what we want. However, our goals give us the steps along the way (see below for short vs. long term goals). It is



not realistic for everyone to say, “I will win an Olympic gold medal in long track speed skating” but it may be achievable to say, “I will get out on skates twice weekly by December 2018.”

TIME-ORIENTED goals include a timeline, and when that is not possible, are timely. It is always preferable to give a date by which your goals will be achieved. However, sometimes that is not possible because the goal is ongoing or dependent on the agreement of others. However, we can always make the goal appropriate to the stage of our lives. It may not be timely for a 24-year-old to write the goal “I will retire”. However, it may be timely for her to write “I will invest in pension, so I can retire at 55-years-old.”

I will....

Start goals with these words as it sets you up for action. If you are unable to say “I will” at the beginning of their goal, it is likely that the goal is unrealistic, hard for you to commit to at this time, or depends on someone else rather than yourself.

Examples of SMART goals

I will return to work part time by _____ through completing my conditioning program three times per week and arranging a gradual return to work with my employer.

I will increase my walking to 1 hour, three times per week by _____ through increasing gradually from my baseline of 10 minutes three times per week.

I will participate in at least one social outing per week by initiating calls to my friends and arranging meetings early in the day within 10 minutes driving distance from my house.

I will pace my housekeeping activities as evidenced by my pain remaining within two pain levels from my baseline pain level through sitting for 5 minutes after every half hour of work.

I will decrease my angry outbursts at my children by using mindfulness, as evidenced by less than two incidents per month.

I will attend water fitness classes three times per week.

I will ensure that my work station set up is ergonomically correct by arranging to see the occupational therapist and following through on any recommendations with my employer.

I will increase my hours of sleep to six hours per night by limiting daytime napping and reducing caffeine intake.



Goal Setting and Action Plans

I will

Apply the Readiness Ruler

How **important** is this change to you right now?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not Somewhat Very

How **confident** are you that you can make this change?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not Somewhat Very

Reflection

Do you have high levels of importance and confidence? Then you are ready! You can go on to the next goal or break it down into progressive weekly action steps (next page). If not, reconsider whether this is the right goal for you right now.

Example:

I will walk 10 000 steps daily, seven days per week, in the next week.

How **important** is this change to you right now?

10: Very important

How **confident** are you that you can make this change?

2: Not confident

It sounds like I would very much like to get there, but I will need to work towards this goal more gradually. I can start by making it more achievable.

Revised: I will walk 6000 steps daily for 5 or more days per week, in the next week.

Note: this would make me gently push myself, but if I have a pain flare up, I can take a day off from walking and rest.

How **important** is this change to you right now?

10: Very important

How **confident** are you that you can make this change?

10: Very confident