

Reaching Your Goals the SMART Way

Are you one of those people who resolve to get back into shape every time the New Year comes around—but for some reason fail to accomplish that goal every year? If so, perhaps you might need to adjust the strategy you use when setting these hard-to-reach objectives.

One proven way to set effective goals is using the SMART goal method. This method will allow you to take those vague ideas and transform them into reality.□

SPECIFIC: The goals must specifically state what is to be accomplished. They must be easily understood and should not be ambiguous or subject to interpretation. For example, rather than stating you would like to improve your fitness level, set a specific goal to be able to run a mile in 12 minutes.□

MEASURABLE: The goals must be measurable so that there is no doubt about whether you achieved them. Measurable goals also allow you to evaluate your progress. Goals can be measured objectively or subjectively (i.e., how you feel and look), or both. For example, you could measure your percent body fat and body weight, but also monitor how your pants fit.□

ATTAINABLE: The goals must be attainable—not too difficult or too easy. Easy goals do not motivate, and overly difficult ones may frustrate you and lead to a perception of failure.□

RELEVANT: The goals must be relevant or pertinent to your particular interests, needs and abilities. For example, when preparing for a 5K walk, running quarter-mile sprints would not be the best approach□

TIME-BOUND: The goals must be time-bound by specific deadlines for completion. Timelines can be both short-term and long-term and should help you stay focused and on track.□

Self-evaluation

If you feel like you are doing everything possible to attain that SMART goal but are still coming up short, perhaps you need a reality check. Try keeping a diet and exercise journal for one week and check to see if you are actually maintaining a program that will get you where you want to be.

Behavioral vs. Physiological

People often start a program with the intention of making a change, but struggle to stick with it. Remember, it is only when you decide that you are ready to make a real commitment to this change and do it for yourself that you expect results. Without a real resolution to change, you will likely encounter many obstacles and barriers that will make sticking with the program difficult. Consider the following tips if you are thinking about starting a program:

- Ask yourself why you want to make this change and for whom are you doing it.

- Write down a list of all the pros (benefits to change) and cons (barriers to change). If the balance swings in favor of the benefits, you are likely to stick with the program.

- Identify a support system. Find individuals of significance in your life who will support your desire to change and perhaps even join you.

- Select some rewards for achieving major steps in your program.

 - Recognize your achievements with treats such as a purchase, attending a function or even taking a trip. Such rewards will help you stay motivated during the beginning of your program.

- Visibly place prompts and cues that constantly remind you of the decision you made to change, and remove any stimuli that may trigger undesirable behaviors. For example, placing visible notes or keeping a workout bag accessible will prompt good behavior, while removing ice cream from the freezer may remove a negative stimulus.