

Goal Setting

Learning to manage chronic pain means that you have to make a number of different changes in your life. These changes may range from: becoming active once again; learning new techniques or strategies to apply while doing specific tasks or activities; to developing new behaviours, e.g. asking for help.

We all know that any change can be hard to make. This is especially true if you don't have a specific plan or direction to follow to help guide you as you make these changes. That is why it is important to set goals.

What is a Goal?

- something you want to achieve
- a target to aim for / a desired result or outcome
- a plan or a direction to work towards
 - takes effort / energy / action to achieve
- the object of a person's ambition or effort
 - it is important to you
- a change or improvement

Why do we set Goals in Pain Management?

- change is difficult, but even more difficult without a plan
- goals create a plan and give direction to help you to make changes
- goals provide structure to help you apply new techniques and strategies that you are being taught at the Program
- achieving goals helps enhance your self-esteem and feeling good about yourself
- helps you to focus on your abilities

By using goal-setting, you set out a plan for yourself to follow as you learn how to cope more effectively with your pain. Having specific goals for yourself helps to give you direction and answers the following questions:

- 1) **What am I hoping to achieve?**
- 2) **What are the steps I have to take to get there?**
- 3) **How will I know when I've reached my target?**

Goal Competition

One barrier to achieving your goals or getting started with making change can be having too many goals to work on at the same time, *ESPECIALLY in the beginning*. They can compete with each other for your time and attention.

You might want to consider:

Habit Stacking

Link your new goal or change to something you are already doing each day:

“Before / After [*current habit*] I will [*new habit*]”

Examples: “Before I *brew my morning coffee*, I will *do meditation or deep breathing for one minute*.”

“After I *have my shower*, I will *have a piece of fruit*.”

“After I *brush my teeth*, I will *do my C’s and J’s exercises*.”

Making change begins by taking the first step!

Ripple Effect of Goal-setting

Over time, as you are making a change in one area it may lead to further changes in other areas.

When You are Making Changes...

A) Sometimes you may need to set an Upper Boundary for your goals.

This helps you identify not only the minimum target that you want to hit but also the upper boundary for yourself. This is especially important when breaking old “all or nothing” habits OR help prevent yourself from overdoing it on a ‘good day’

Examples:

- Fitness: “I will walk for 10 minutes three evenings this week on M, W, F *but not more than 15 minutes.*”
- Productivity: “I will carry 2 grocery bags into the house, *but not more than 3.*”

B) You have to focus not only on achieving the end result or outcome ... you may also need to change the system that causes unwanted results

Example: Goal of ‘mowing the lawn’ - You might get task completed and so meet your goal BUT end up in more pain because you pushed yourself and overdid it.

Changing the ‘system’ will lead to lasting change!

(Some of the content on this page extrapolated from: *JamesClear.com* “Goal-setting: A Scientific Guide to Setting and Achieving Goals”)

Apply the SMART Rule to Your Goals

In order to increase the chance of being successful a goal should be **S.M.A.R.T.**

Specific:

- use well defined, clear, unambiguous language. Your goal states exactly what you are striving to achieve. In other words, it identifies what your target is.
EXAMPLE: "I will be more active" is not as specific as "I will walk for 10 minutes, two nights this week".

Measurable:

- there needs to be a way to determine whether or not the goal has been met.
EXAMPLE: When you look back at your goal "I will walk for 10 minutes, two nights this week" at the end of the week, you will be able to measure whether you met your goal or not.

Achievable:

- make your goal ambitious but not outrageous. Is your goal something you can achieve at this point in time? and in the amount of time you've given yourself?

Realistic:

- is your goal based on your current abilities? Are you setting a goal within your limits, or do you have too high of expectations of yourself? It is important when you start to make changes that you set goals which will result in success.

Time bound:

- does your goal have a start and finish date? Set a time for when you plan to work on your goal, or set a day/date when you hope to have accomplished your goal.

Tips for Successful Goal Setting

- make a list of your desired goals / plans for change
- define *your* own goals. Your goals should be related to *your* central needs and values.
- prioritize your goals: which are the more important ones to start with
- break your goals down into manageable steps
- envision or see yourself arriving at your goal / being successful with your goal. It's a lot easier to build on successes than failures.
- define what steps you may need to take in order to accomplish your goals
- you want to be realistic with what you are setting out for yourself, but at the same time you want to test or challenge your capabilities / limits
- keep the “Goldilocks Rule” in mind:

‘Not too hard ... Not too easy ... Just right.’

You want to push yourself hard enough to make progress, but not so much that you won't be able to keep the progress going.

- pay attention to your “gut instinct”

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Here are some additional questions you can think of while writing your goals which might help you to set both long-term and short-term pain management goals for yourself:

- What qualities or skills do I want to improve?
- Have I broken my goal into a number of smaller steps?
- What would be the first sign that I am making progress?
- If this was a friend's goal, what would I advise him/her to do to get started?
- What will be different about me? What would others see or observe when I have made this change?

Goal Setting Circle



COMMON PITFALLS TO EFFECTIVE GOAL SETTING

- Failing to see gradual changes as real or important
- Acceptance is seen as giving up
- Setting expectations too high
- Not writing it down
- Impatience
- Fear ...
- “The pain has to be gone first.”
- Viewing set-backs as personal failure
- Assuming a “stubborn” approach to change
- Assuming a “passive” approach to making change
- Evaluating your progress daily instead of allowing enough time for change to happen