



FACT SHEET

Health Access for Independent Living (HAIL)

Goal Setting

What Is Goal Setting?

A goal is something you want to do or achieve. Many goals address something you want to change about yourself or something you want to do differently. For example, learning how to use the local paratransit service can be a goal. Or you could have an exercise goal to do wheelchair pushups once per hour every day. Goals can help you focus on what you want to do and keep you from being distracted. Setting a goal can also help you be more persistent about pursuing what you want.

We all have goals, but sometimes we don't say them out loud or write them down. Expressing what our goals are, either by saying or writing them, can make a difference. Of course, even when we do write them down, such as making a New Year's resolution, we may not follow through. For example, we might make a New Year's resolution to be kinder to people or to lose weight, but by the end of January, we may have forgotten our goal or don't see any changes.

Goal setting works when we define in specific, measurable terms what we hope to achieve in different aspects of our life, such as our health, education, work, and relationships. You can set your goals on your own. You can also set goals with help from other people such as family members and professionals (like Center for Independent Living staff members, counselors, social workers, doctors, and fitness trainers).

People who set goals are more likely to have a better quality of life. For example, people who set clear goals may have better health and better satisfaction in their social life. In addition, they may have more positive emotions, and feel more in control of their lives.

Different Types of Goals

You might have heard of different ways of describing goals. For example, you can have short-term, long-term, and even lifetime goals. You can have big goals or small goals. You can also have goals that focus on a process that will help you reach your ultimate goals – the “how to” get there. Here we discuss goals as we use them in our HAIL project.



Your goals can focus on something that is important or relevant to you, such as your health, education, work, or relationships.

- **Long-term goals and short-term goals.** Long-term goals are goals that you hope to achieve in the future, such as a year down the road. Short-term goals are goals that you want to achieve in the near future, perhaps within the next month or two. These two types of goals can work together. For example, Maya wants to lose weight, so she sets a long-term goal to lose 30 pounds in a year, with a short-term goal to lose two to three pounds each month. In another example, Joseph now uses a wheelchair after a stroke. He set a long-term goal to walk again in one year. His short-term goal is to stand for 30 minutes at a time within one month.
- **Outcome goals and process goals.** An outcome goal is *what* you hope to achieve, the change you want to make in your life. Some examples of outcome goals are: managing your health better (for example, losing weight or exercising regularly); talking to your doctors more effectively; or increasing your community participation. Process goals say *how* you will reach those outcomes, and cover the procedures, activities or steps you must take. In Maya's weight loss example above, losing 30 pounds in a year is an outcome goal. To reach this goal, she can set one or many process goals.

For instance, she may decide to exercise four times weekly for at least 20 minutes, to cut her soda consumption from one can each day to one can weekly (and to drink more water instead), and/or to replace foods that have high sugar or fat content with vegetables or fruit on five days of the week. (It can help to set a positive goal, like drinking six glasses of water a day, to complement your negative goal of drinking less soda. Then you are creating a good new habit.)

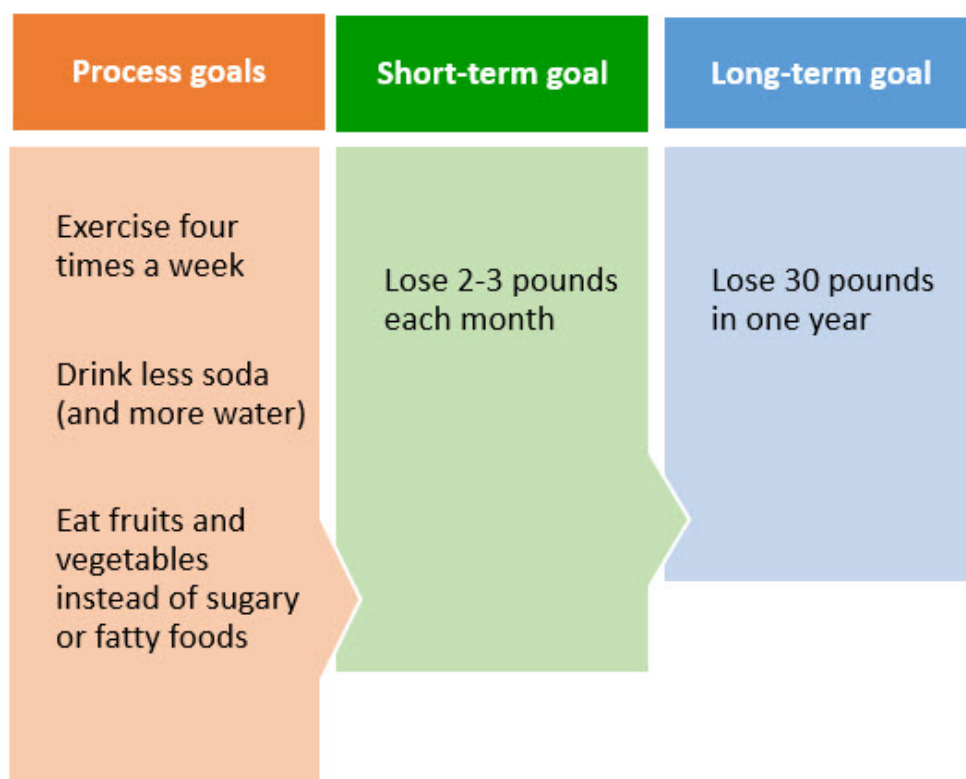
It helps to set your long-term goal first, but your work begins with your process goals. They will carry you forward to meeting your short- and long-term goals.

How Do I Set Goals? Get SMART!

Emphasize short-term goals and process goals. Long-term goals and outcome goals are great motivators. They remind you of the future you are working for and that there is a greater purpose for what you are doing today. Achieving goals, especially the long-term and outcome goals, can be exciting and satisfying.

However, to reach them, you have to follow through with your short-term and process goals. These goals help you stay focused on the present. Sometimes you may find a task tedious or hard. Or

Your process goals will carry you forward to meeting your short-term and long-term goals.





some other challenges come up in your life while you are pursuing your goals. Perhaps you are just not in the mood for the task at hand and you want to delay it.

At those times, you can think about how your actions fit into your long-term and outcome goals. Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher once said, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Short-term goals and process goals are like stepping stones that you can use to measure your progress and build a pathway that leads to your long-term and outcome goals. While all of your goals are important, setting short-term goals and process goals make it easier to turn your goals into actions. Also, they can strengthen your confidence and empower you because they are relatively easier to achieve than the long-term goals and outcome goals.

There are many different approaches to setting goals, but they all have a few simple things in common.

- **First, prioritize your goals.** You may have multiple goals that you want to achieve, but you may not have the time, energy, and resources to work on them all at the same time. Use the “quality, not quantity” rule when setting goals. To decide which goals you want to tackle first, you may choose the one that is most important to you, or maybe you want to choose a goal that you can accomplish right now without a lot of work. Perhaps you choose

a particular goal because it opens the door to achieving some of your other goals. In choosing a goal to tackle first, you need to evaluate your time, energy and resources.

- **Second, choose your own goals.** Goals are most effective when they are important to you rather than assigned by other people. Even if you are setting your goals with someone else or someone who is a professional, be polite but assertive, and set your own goals.
- **Third, set SMART goals.** SMART stands for: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based. Goals are most effective when they are **specific** (you know exactly what you will do), **measurable** (you know when you have reached the goal), and **attainable** (you can realistically accomplish the goal). If your goals are vague and ambiguous, you will be more likely to give up on them. For example, “I will find a place to exercise” is quite vague. Where do you begin? In contrast, this goal is specific: “I will call the three fitness centers closest to my home to ask if they have an arm cycle that accommodates wheelchair users.” If your goals are too big and vague, you will be more easily frustrated and may begin to doubt your ability to achieve them.

Measurable means that you will know when you have reached your goal. If your goal is to exercise

three times a week (instead of “I will exercise more often”), you will know whether or not you achieved it. **Relevant** means the goal has value or meaning to your life, and **time-based** means you set a specific time frame or deadline for reaching your goal.

As you develop your SMART goals, answer the following questions:

Is the goal specific? (Do you name your target activity or desired performance?)

Is the goal measurable? (How will you know when the goal has been achieved? Do you have some criteria or standards for your performance?)

Is the goal realistic? (Do you have enough time and resources to achieve it? Are you capable of performing the steps that are required?)

Is the goal relevant to your needs for personal and/or professional development? (If the goal is important to someone else but not to you, can you find one that is more meaningful?)

Is the goal time-based? (How often will this task be done? What is your deadline to accomplish this goal?)

If you cannot answer all of the SMART questions with “yes,” then take another look at your goals, and adjust them accordingly. Let’s use Maya’s weight loss example again to show the differences between goals that are SMART and not SMART.

Non-SMART goal for weight loss: “I want to lose a lot of weight!”

No matter how sincere this wish is, more than likely you will end up with no changes. This goal is not SMART at all! Think about the SMART questions to write a SMART goal:

SMART goal for weight loss: “I want to lose 30 pounds [**specific, measurable, relevant**] in 12 months [**time-based, attainable**] by exercising four times a week for at least 20 minutes [**specific, measurable**], and by cutting my soda drinking from one can daily to one can weekly [**specific, measurable**].”

Review Your Goals

Goals are more effective when you can see the progress you have made, when the people and things around you are supporting you, and when you can receive positive feedback about your progress. It takes time to accomplish goals, and sometimes it can be so slow that you feel nothing has really changed. It is important to review what you have accomplished on a regular basis. Use this time to check what you have done and celebrate your successes. Also use this time to analyze what you need to change to keep moving forward. Your goals can be flexible – take this opportunity to adjust your goals as needed. See more detailed information about reviewing goals in the “Track and Review Your Goals” fact sheet.

Goal setting can help you work toward the things that you really want to do and that will enhance your health and well-being. Setting SMART goals takes practice, but once you get the hang of it, you can be on your way to being empowered, and to defining and pursuing your success.

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