

Set SMART goals for a healthy new year

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URBANA, IL – If you're making New Year's resolutions, a good first step is making your goals specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound (or SMART), said a University of Illinois nutrition and wellness educator.

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"As the New Year gets under way, many of us will make New Year's resolutions that revolve around health issues, such as setting weight loss goals, starting a smoking cessation program, reducing alcohol intake, or becoming more physically active," said Marilyn Csernus.

But making New Year's resolutions is much easier than keeping them. Most people can relate to having fallen short of reaching their goals in years past, she added.

Csernus Uses Weight Loss As An Example In Setting A SMART Goal. Here's How To Do It.

S = SPECIFIC. Goals should be specific rather than broad or vague. Don't just say that your goal is weight loss. Instead resolve to lose 2 pounds per week over the next 3 months.

M = MEASURABLE. How can we know if we've achieved our goals if they are not measurable? A broad goal of losing an unspecific amount of weight in no specific time frame is difficult to measure. But losing 2 pounds per week over the next 3 months is easy to measure. Being able to track your progress builds confidence and may motivate you long after the flurry and excitement of the New Year has subsided.

A = ATTAINABLE. You will probably have trouble attaining goals that are too lofty. Losing 5 pounds per week isn't doable under normal circumstances and will likely result in a feeling of failure and frustration when you can't reach your goal. Losing 2 pounds per week over a 3-month period is attainable for most people who are in good health and can tolerate activity.

R = REALISTIC. Goals must be realistic! A goal of losing 10 pounds by the upcoming weekend so you can fit into a certain outfit is totally unrealistic and will only sabotage your efforts. Again, losing 2 pounds per week over a 3-month period is a realistic goal.

T = TIME BOUND. If you don't use a time frame when setting goals, they may fall by the wayside when the demands of everyday life get in the way. Having a target date to reach your goal will keep you on track and accountable for your actions. An open-ended time frame for meeting a goal allows you to put off your efforts until tomorrow.

"The SMART strategy will work with any goal you set, so take time to evaluate your present lifestyle and choose one health-related habit that needs changing," Csernus said.

Any change you make should be your personal priority rather than someone else's priority for you, she noted.

"Once a decision has been made, use the SMART technique to outline the steps that will help you reach your goal," she added.