

**When you complete this module, you will be able to . . .**

- Understand the importance of setting goals
- Write action-oriented goals to achieve weight loss results

A goal is a vision of what you want to accomplish. It should be meaningful and appropriate so that your commitment to reaching your goal stays strong. A weight loss goal can be the outcome of your efforts: for example, losing 30 pounds, or it can be an action you take to help you get to the outcome; for example, having fruit instead of candy for a daily snack.

It's important to set action-oriented goals because they focus your efforts on how to achieve the results you want. These goals require behavior changes that will lead to the outcome you desire.

The first step in setting goals is to identify the types of behavior that directly impact your weight: what you eat, why you eat, and how much exercise you do. Then consider what you need to do to solve the problem behavior. For example, "I don't exercise enough. I need to walk more during the week." Or "I snack on chocolate bars during the day. I need to choose lower calorie snacks instead."

Now set some goals to help you change these behaviors. It's best to write down your goals and state them in a positive way. State what you will do, like "I will eat a piece of fruit for an evening snack," instead of what you won't do, like "I won't eat ice cream at night." To keep your goals manageable, make your goals SMART—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-oriented.

- Specific goals are clearly defined. For example, "I will start to exercise" is vague; "I will walk for 15 minutes during my lunch break three times a week" is specific.
- Measurable goals tell you "how much." For example, "I will walk 15 minutes three times a week" can be measured by counting how many minutes you walk and how many times you walk during the week.
- Attainable goals are reachable. Unattainable goals can decrease your motivation to succeed. For example, "I will look like an athlete after two weeks of exercising" is not likely. "I will walk 15 minutes three times a week and do weight training two times a week" is attainable.
- Realistic goals are practical and fit your lifestyle. For example, "I will take a 20 minute walk every day" may not be realistic if you have a very hectic schedule. "I will walk for ten minutes twice a day, three times a week," may better fit your lifestyle.
- Time-oriented goals have a start and a finish. For example, "I will walk 15 minutes starting today and do this at least two more times by the end of the week" helps to keep you on track toward achieving your goal.

Once you've written down your goals using the SMART guidelines, you're ready to put the goals into action. Changing behaviors takes time, so prioritize your goals and choose one or two goals for now. When you're comfortable with your progress, you can then begin to work on the other goals.