

## Physical activity - setting yourself goals

When you're trying to become more physically active, it's good to set realistic fitness goals and monitor your progress. Remember to see your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are over 40 years, overweight, haven't exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.

### Principles of goal setting

The main principles of effective goal setting include:

- Pinpoint your ultimate goal.
- Work out the best way to achieve your goal.
- Break down your ultimate goal into small, specific and achievable mini-goals.
- Monitor your progress regularly.
- Adapt your goals to fit changing circumstances.
- Don't berate yourself or give up if you fall short.
- Write down your goals.
- Make your goals known to others.
- Include a reward in your goal-setting process. Plan for how you will benefit if you meet this goal.

### Pinpoint your ultimate goal

Suggestions include:

- Be realistic. Your ultimate fitness goal could be to be fit enough to participate in a competition on a set date, or to do 50 laps of the pool. Whatever the case, make this goal realistic. Remember that most of us will never be world-famous athletes or supermodels. Think about what is achievable for you. Write this goal down in a training diary.
- Don't make your ultimate goal a general statement like 'I want to lose weight'. Be specific. Make it measurable. Exactly how many kilograms do you want to lose?
- Choose a goal that is meaningful and important to you, not to anybody else. For example, if your partner wants you to lose weight but you're happy as you are, you may find it difficult to commit to your exercise routine in the long term.
- Consider a process rather than, or in addition to, outcome goals. For example, instead of weight loss, aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes four days per week.

### Find out how to achieve your ultimate goal

It's not enough to decide on a fitness goal. You need a plan to reach that goal. Different fitness goals require different approaches. For example, weight loss requires you to regularly burn more kilojoules than you consume. An effective strategy may include:

- Choose aerobic activities such as walking.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.
- Cut back on junk food.
- Eat smaller food portions.
- Increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy products and wholegrain foods in your daily diet.

If you are unsure how to best achieve your particular fitness goals, ask an expert. For example, see your doctor, browse through the Better Health Channel articles or consult an exercise physiologist, physiotherapist or appropriately qualified and certified personal trainer..

### Set small, specific mini-goals

You are more likely to reach your ultimate goal if you break it down into small and specific mini-goals. Suggestions include:

- Set a reasonable time frame. For example, if you want to lose 20kg, then a realistic weight loss of 1kg of body fat per week means that you need to allow yourself around 20 weeks.
- Consider your exercise routines as mini-goals. For example, one mini-goal might be to exercise on all or most days of the week.
- Mini-goals should be set for every week or every fortnight. The more mini-goals you achieve, the more motivated you will become.

### **Monitor your progress regularly**

Make your mini-goals measurable. Decide how you are going to monitor your progress and record every detail in a training diary. Suggestions include:

- Measure your progress in concrete ways. For example, if you weight train, write down the weight and repetitions for each exercise. If you are exercising to lose weight, keep track of your weight loss.
- Choose appropriate ways to measure your progress. For example, bathroom scales don't distinguish between muscle and fat. It may be better to take your measurements with a tape measure.
- Write down your progress at set intervals such as once a week.
- Find as many different ways to monitor your progress as you can. For example, if you are exercising to lose weight, you might like to record your exercise sessions, daily diet and weekly measurements. Include incidental achievements like feeling more energetic or fitting into a smaller pair of jeans. Give yourself plenty of ways to succeed.
- Celebrate your progress.

### **Adapt to changing circumstances**

Life can interrupt your training schedule. Suggestions include:

- Think about ways to cope with interruptions. For example, you may not be able to exercise in your usual way when on holidays, but you can always walk or use the hotel fitness facilities.
- If you get injured or ill, don't abandon your fitness goals. Instead, adjust your ultimate goal's time frame. Come up with micro-goals to keep you on track while you recover. For example, you may be too ill to exercise, but you can improve your diet. Write down these micro-goals in your training diary to keep up your motivation.
- You may find that you achieve your fitness goal earlier than expected. Go ahead and set another goal.
- If your fitness goal seems beyond you, set your sights a little lower and stay motivated.

### **Don't be too hard on yourself**

Sometimes, you may find that your fitness goal is too ambitious. For example, maybe you are losing 0.5kg a week instead of 1kg. Suggestions include:

- The first few months of a new exercise program are always the most challenging. Adjust your short-term goals, persist and have faith that things will get easier with time.
- Celebrate your achievements, no matter how small. Making a commitment to a healthier lifestyle is a tremendous achievement, even if your fitness goal is a little harder to reach than you first thought. Flip back to the start of your training diary and appreciate how far you've come.
- Have a secondary fitness goal in mind. For example, if your ultimate goal is to lose 20kg, a loss of 15kg may be your secondary goal. Achieving this secondary goal is still a great success.
- Don't give up. You're worth the effort.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- 'Go for your life' Infoline service Tel. 1300 739 899
- BHC Activity finder

### **Things to remember**

- Break down your ultimate fitness goal into small, specific and achievable mini-goals.

- Keep a training diary to monitor your progress.
- Always see your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are over 40 years, overweight, haven't exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.

**Want to know more?**

For references, related links and support group information, go to [More information](#).

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Kinect Australia (inc VICFIT in Victoria)

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