

Making a Health Goal Plan

With the new year, you may be thinking about your new year's resolution. The most common resolutions usually involve health goals. So why not make a plan that helps you achieve your health goals so you can live your best life.

Health goals often revolve around weight loss or appearance. Still, there are so many more factors involved in health and well-being than just losing a muffin top. Age, family health history, current weight and BMI, and fitness level all affect your health goal and the length of time it will take to achieve it.

You need to know your starting point. You can define it by asking yourself:



- What are your current health statistics: height, weight, Body Mass Index, girth measurements. How do these compare with typical measurements?

- Do you exercise? How often and for how long?

- Do you get enough sleep? Do you feel tired a lot?



- What is your fitness level? Can you walk five miles without stopping? Can you jog five miles, and how long does it take? What weight can you lift? How many squats, push-ups, and chin-ups can you do? How is your flexibility?

- Do you have any bad eating habits? Are you addicted to certain foods? Are you an emotional eater? Do you eat too little?



- Do you have any ailments that affect your health and well-being? Do you always seem to be run-down or sick?

- Do you feel depressed or stressed often?

- What is your family's health history? Do you know what your health issues are?

A good starting point when setting health goals is a physical assessment of your general health. Your doctor can even refer you to specialists who can help you manage the specifics of your goal, e.g., nutritionist/dietician, therapist, or counselor. Your doctor can also let you know of any risks you need to look out for as you embark on your health journey.

Before setting lofty health goals, it's important to do a little research and learn what is realistic and how to get there. You wouldn't drive across the country without looking at a map or having directions to your destination. It's no different with a health goal. You need a strategy.

So, you can't expect to learn everything there is to know about the human body, but you should try to get a basic understanding of the biology behind your specific health goal, whether it be:



- The relationship between diet, exercise, and weight loss
- How the body's metabolism works and how diet affects it (both good and bad)
- The fundamentals of clean and good eating habits
- Suitable forms of exercise for your particular goal (running, weights, yoga)



- Successful methods for beating smoking, alcoholism, or drugs
- Stress management or dealing with mental health issues
- The importance of sleep and what is good sleep hygiene

Talk to relevant health professionals and research your goal, so you have a good idea of the proper action steps to take. Once you know what you have to do to achieve your goal, you can set time frames for milestones along the way. For example, if your goal is to lose forty pounds, set milestones of losing one pound a week and four to five pounds each month. From there, you can break it down even further. For instance, plan on eating 500 fewer calories a day to lose the pounds. Creating milestones and time frames for achieving them is imperative to success.

Depending on your starting point, you will decide on a time frame. Some general guidelines are:



- Give yourself one week per one to two pounds of weight loss.
- Give yourself three to six months to get into peak physical fitness.
- Give yourself at least six weeks to break a habit like smoking, and maybe even longer for alcohol and drug dependency.

Even if it takes you longer, stay the course. It could take up to twelve months to feel healthy or overcome an ailment, depending on your starting point.

Remember to measure your progress toward each goal. Tracking your progress allows you to make adjustments as needed. You can measure:



- Weight, BMI, or body fat percentage
- Physical activity—how long does it take to run one mile, or how much weight you can lift
- Number of cigarettes smoked, alcoholic drinks, or drugs taken per day

Along with numerical measurements, you can also create a ranking scale based on how you feel. For instance, rank from one to five how energized you feel each morning or one to ten how happy you feel each day. You can also cross-correlate these with your numerical data to see any patterns.

The bottom line when setting a health goal is to know your starting point and make a realistic timeline to get to your goal. Remember to measure your progress along the way, and don't get discouraged if you have setbacks. It takes time and consistency to achieve anything. If you can find a support system of friends, family, or coworkers to help motivate you, that's even better.