

Goal setting

A great way of taking back control, for people who live with persistent pain



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Produced by *Live Well with Pain*, a partnership of pain specialists and people with lived experience of pain.

Live Well with Pain produces a range of trusted self-management tools and resources for people with pain and the healthcare professionals who support them.

All resources are available free online at livewellwithpain.co.uk

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“I used to feel defeated by my pain. It completely controlled my life. But the skills I’ve learned through the Ten Footsteps programme mean I can actually start to enjoy life again. Thank you Live Well with Pain!”

Feedback from a person using the Live Well with Pain website

“Live Well with Pain is such a useful resource – I share it with patients every day!”

GP, Tyneside



Goals help us to focus on the things that matter most to us. When we make progress towards achieving our goals, it helps us feel more confident and that we’ve achieved something.

Sometimes though, for people with persistent pain, reaching our goals may be so challenging that it doesn’t even seem worth trying.

Yet, even though achieving a goal may take longer and require more planning, this doesn’t mean it’s impossible. This is where the skill of *goal setting* comes in . . .

You can set goals for any area of your life. For example, you might want to be more physically active, so you could set yourself a goal to swim two lengths of the local pool twice a week, to be achieved over a three month period.

You may want to be less reliant on medicines to manage your pain, so you could set a goal with your health practitioner to reduce them over a period of time.

Or you may want to socialise more, in which case you might set a goal of having a family meal out, going and listening to a band, or a half-day shopping trip to the shopping centre with friends, once a month.

Think of your goals as if they are a destination you want to reach.

If the destination is close, then the goal will be short term. Alternatively, if your sights are set far in the distance, then it may be long-term goals that you need.

When you set goals, you also need to think about *how* you will achieve them. What kind of journey is it going to be?

Rather like a train journey, you may have to change routes, deal with delays, faults on the line or timetable changes; but in the end, you will get there. So let’s look at what might help . . .

SMART goal setting

SMART goal setting is a way of setting goals so that you have the best chance of achieving them. To understand this, let's start by imagining some typical goals that a person might have. Meet Freda ...

Freda's goals

Take a look at Freda's goals.

They are a good start, and yet they're a bit vague.

Can she even be sure when she's reached them?

This is where SMART comes in.



Freda's SMART goals

So, applying the rules described on the previous page, here's what Freda's goals look like now she's made them SMART.

As you can see Freda now has some clear actions to take.

They are **specific** so Freda has guidance on what she's planning to do and she can **measure** when she's done them.

Freda has also made sure they are realistically **achievable** for her at the moment.

She knows they are things she really wants to do – so achieving them will be **rewarding**.

And they're **timed** because there's a defined time by which Freda aims to achieve them – SMART!



SMART goal setting made simple

SMART is way of focusing your goals to make sure they are:

Specific – setting out exactly what will be achieved

Measurable – how often will you do it, or for how long

Achievable – ensuring your goal is realistic for you at the moment

Rewarding – you're more likely to get there if your goal is enjoyable

Timed – planning how much time is needed to achieve the goal

If you apply these SMART rules to your goals, you'll be far more likely to achieve them!

Top tip: Reward yourself!

Another useful way to reach your goals is to use rewards.

Rewards are tiny treats or pleasures that can provide a boost when you are working towards goals.

They could be things like a trip to the movies, spending some time in the garden, or simply having afternoon tea with a friend. Rewards, when used regularly with goals, give a sense of




pleasure and achievement, and help build confidence. They give us the drive to keep going, even when it seems difficult. They encourage us to think 'it's worth a try.'

Rewards also help us to repeat activities. We tend to do more of something if we feel rewarded for it, either by ourselves or by others.

Come up with your own SMART goals

Now we've looked at SMART goal setting, it's time to think about your own goals.

What are they, and how can you make them SMART?

My SMART goals 	
Area of my life <i>(You don't have to do them all)</i>	My SMART goal <i>(Make sure it's specific, measurable, achievable, rewarding and timed)</i>
Social life <i>Eg: go for a meal, have coffee with a friend, see the grandkids</i>	
Work <i>Eg: paid or voluntary, reduce/increase hours, retrain</i>	
Hobbies / fun activities <i>Eg: gardening, fishing, drama, walking, guitar, meet friends</i>	
Household tasks <i>Eg: sweep or vacuum, clean the sinks, hang out washing</i>	
Physical activity <i>Eg: body stretches, walk to shops, football in park, swim or dance for health sessions</i>	
Caring for myself <i>Eg: bath, putting my own socks and shoes on, having a treat</i>	

Top tip

You can draw your own SMART Goals and Goal Ladder on a piece of paper, using the examples here as a guide. Or you can download and print specially designed templates for free when you sign up at: livewellwithpain.co.uk

Goal ladders

It often helps to break your goals down into smaller, achievable steps. Think of them like rungs on a ladder. Each rung is another step towards achieving the bigger goal.

Have a go at working out weekly steps towards your own goals. Write your goal at the top then fill in what you'll do week-by-week to get there.

My SMART goal at the end of four weeks is to:

Now add weekly steps on the ladder to help you get there (don't forget to include weekly rewards to give you a regular boost!)

Week 4. I will...

Week 3. I will...

Week 2. I will...

Week 1. I will...

More tips for successful goal setting

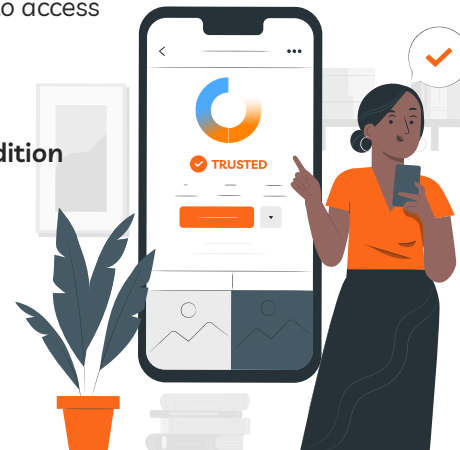
- To get started with SMART goal setting, experiment by trying a fairly easy goal.
- Avoid an unpleasant activity or a really tricky goal like losing weight, as these can demotivate you.
- Don't overdo it: people with pain often aim too high, or try to do things too early or quickly, which often leads to setbacks and a sense of failure.
- Your goal should be a bit of a challenge but not so difficult that your pain becomes more difficult to manage.
- Don't be afraid to review and, if necessary, revise your goals as you go along.
- It isn't a test. So if it seems a struggle, try a more fun or rewarding goal.
- Try telling other people about your goals – it will help them understand what matters to you and how they can help you make progress.
- And remember to give yourself rewards at every step help build feelings of success and enjoyment.



For more tips and ideas about how to self manage your persistent pain why not visit the *Live Well with Pain* website?

Live Well with Pain is dedicated to providing easy-to-use self management resources that are used and trusted by many thousands of people living with pain – and the clinicians who support them. Everything is free to access and the site covers topics like:

- understanding pain and the brain
- accepting pain as a long term condition
- setting goals for yourself – and achieving them
- learning how to pace yourself, so you can do more
- relaxation and mindfulness skills
- getting a good night's sleep
- relationships and pain
- pain medicines and their side effects
- planning for setbacks – and overcoming them



Visit [livewellwithpain.co.uk](https://www.livewellwithpain.co.uk)

and start your self management journey today.



Version 02. 09/23 © Live Well with Pain 2023

Design: www.andrassymedia.co.uk