

# Goal setting – a great way of taking back control

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Goals are a helpful way of noticing and recording the progress you make over time. Sometimes, for people with chronic pain, achieving your goals may take longer and require more planning. However, this doesn't mean it is impossible.

One way of increasing your ability to reach your goals is to develop the skill of *goal setting*. As you'll see, goal setting helps you get back control in many different areas of your life and this, in turn, will increase your self-confidence.

## How setting goals helps with managing chronic pain

Goals help you to focus on the things that matter most to you. Working towards goals helps you make progress which will help you to feel more confident.

Yet achieving goals, especially for people living with chronic pain can be a difficult and challenging process, and you may even feel like there's no point in trying.

One way of increase your ability to reach your goals is to develop the skill of **goal setting**.

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 GP or pain specialist 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.

### How to set goals

Think of your goals as if they are an end destination. If the destination is close, then goals 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 need to think about how you will achieve them. What kind of journey are you going to



### Rewards - a useful tool in your goal setting toolkit

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 in conjunction with goals, give a sense of pleasure, satisfaction or 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.

take? For people who live with chronic pain, setting goals and working towards them can be a challenge.

Rather like a train taking you on a 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:



**Freda's goals**

1. Rely less on a walking stick when I go out for a walk
2. Get back to cycling
3. Slowly stop taking pain medicines

Freda's goals are a good start, but at the moment they're a bit vague. How long should they take? How far must Freda go before she can say she's achieved her goals? Can she even be sure that she will ever reach these goals?

This is where SMART comes in. Quite simply SMART is way of focusing your goals to make sure they are:

**Specific Measurable Achievable Rewarding Timed**

**Specific** – means setting out exactly what will be achieved  
**Measurable** – means deciding often something will happen, or for how long  
**Achievable** – thinking about this ensures your goal will be realistic  
**Rewarding** – this is a reminder to make sure your goal will be enjoyable  
**Timed** – means planning how much time is needed to achieve the goal

If you apply these SMART rules to your goals, you'll have a much better idea of how to go about achieving them. And you'll be far more likely to get there!

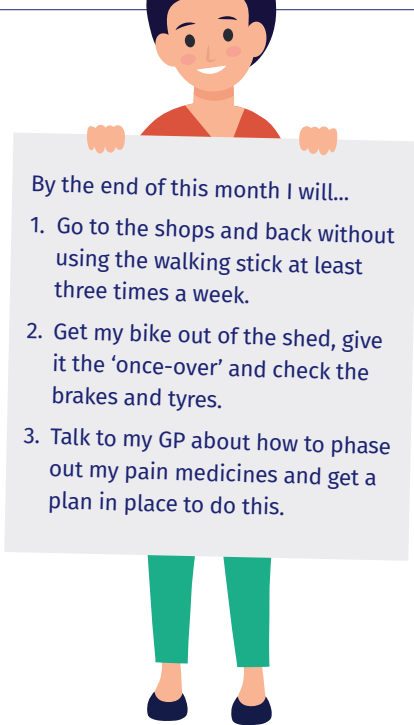
**Freda's SMART goals**

So, applying the rules described above, 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 also knows they are things wants to do – so achieving them will be **rewarding**.

And they're **timed** because there's a defined period in which Freda aims to do them – SMART!



By the end of this month I will...

1. Go to the shops and back without using the walking stick at least three times a week.
2. Get my bike out of the shed, give it the 'once-over' and check the brakes and tyres.
3. Talk to my GP about how to phase out my pain medicines and get a plan in place to do this.

## My SMART goals

Now think about your own goals – what are they, and how can you make them SMART?

Writing down your goals in *My SMART goals* is a good way to start thinking about goals in different areas of your life.

**My SMART goals**  
Use this in conjunction with *Reaching goals and creating rewards* - a guide to SMART goal setting from My Live Well with Pain

Area of my life	Example goals to give you inspiration	My SMART goals (you don't have to fill them all in)
Social/fun activities	Go out for a meal, watch a film, have a coffee with a friend, do craftwork, plant up a flowerbed	
Work	Paid or voluntary, staying in current role, reduce/increase hours, retrain	
Hobbies	Gardening, fishing, drama, walking, guitar	
Household tasks	Changing and making beds, cooking meals, vacuuming, cleaning, managing finances	
Physical activity	Stretches, walking to the shops, football in park, yoga, swimming	
Caring for myself	Having a bath, putting my own socks and shoes on, cooking a nice meal	

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## My goal ladder

It may also be useful to think about your SMART goals like steps on a ladder. This will help you to break each goal down into smaller achievable steps, week by week, to build up to the bigger goal.

Have a go at writing your week-by-week steps for your own goals, by filling in the blank spaces in *My goal ladder*. It's a good idea to think of each step as taking about a week to achieve.

**My goal ladder**  
Use this in conjunction with *Reaching goals and creating rewards* - a guide to SMART goal setting from My Live Well with Pain

My goal is: \_\_\_\_\_

My SMART goal at the end of 4 weeks is to: \_\_\_\_\_

Steps on the way to reaching my goal	Things that will help my progress	Things that might block my progress
Week 4		
Week 3		
Week 2		
Week 1		
START		

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You can download and print your own *My SMART Goals* and *My Goal Ladder* FREE at:

[www.my.livewellwithpain.co.uk/resources/booklets-and-leaflets/goal-setting](http://www.my.livewellwithpain.co.uk/resources/booklets-and-leaflets/goal-setting)

## Some more tips

- To get started with SMART goal setting, **experiment by trying a fairly easy goal**.
- **Avoid an unpleasant chore 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 too difficult** so 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 sharing your goals with other people** – it will help them to understand what matters to you and how they can help you make progress.
- And **remember to build in regular rewards** for yourself along the way.

## Summary

SMART goal setting is a skill that will give you a clear view of what you want to achieve in a set timeframe.

It will help you plan how you get there and continue to reach goals successfully.

By breaking down your goals into manageable steps, you'll be able to see your progress, and notice the things that help – or hinder – you achieving what you want to do.

Once you get used to SMART goal setting, it will start to become a natural part of your self-care routine.

You'll find that things you never thought you could achieve are now possible. And you may even start using SMART goal setting in other parts of your life.



For lots more tips and resources to help you live well despite your persistent pain go to:

[www.my.livewellwithpain.co.uk](http://www.my.livewellwithpain.co.uk)

*My Live Well with Pain* has been created by a group of clinicians who specialise in working with people with persistent pain. After many years of working with people with pain, they have recognised that one of the keys to living well with pain is **self-management**.

When people self-manage their pain, their quality of life improves. Eventually it stops dominating their day and they begin to get more out of life.

*My Live Well with Pain* is a collection of resources that are designed to help you learn the skills you need to become an effective self-manager of your pain.

By using the resources in this website – and with support from your GP or pain specialist – you will be able to learn how to do this too.

Use them wisely – and share what you learn with your pain specialist, and other supportive people around you. They'll be able to give you more encouragement, so that your journey is a successful one and you can truly live well with pain. Good luck!