How to Set a SMART Goal

SMART is an acronym used to help fine-tune self-care goals. There are variations as far as what different groups say it stands for, but one of the more common versions is:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-Bound

SMART goals can be helpful to include into an Integrative Health plan. To write one, begin by focusing on a goal that is important to a Veteran. This goal should tie in to what really matters to them and closely rates to their Mission, Aspiration, Purpose (MAP).

After you have a general goal in mind, apply the principles of SMART goals to focus in on how to reach it. These are featured in the table below. As you help someone set a goal, remember the following:

- It is better to break a general goal down into smaller goals that are easier to reach, in order to increase the odds of success.
- The more detail the better. “I will exercise more” is very vague. “Starting on Monday, July 1, I will walk in the mall for 20 minutes and keep doing that every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday” is more detailed and incorporates all of the SMART elements.
- Make sure both you and the patient agree (at least to some degree) about the goal. Shared goal setting is a powerful process. Explain your reasoning.
- Don’t forget to follow up later to see how it is going with reaching the goal. If they are stalled out, is it best to change goals, or simplify it somehow?
- Table 1 is designed to help you take a patient through this process.
## Putting the “SMART” in Goal Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMART Goal Element</th>
<th>Questions to Consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Specific**       | • Be very clear and detailed about what you want to do and why.  
                   | • What is required? What are the challenges?  
                   | • How will you do it? What are your assets and resources?  
                   | • Who will be involved? |
| **Measurable**     | • How will you know you are making progress?  
                   | • How will you know you have reached your goal? |
| **Attainable**     | • Do you have what you need to reach the goal?  
                   | • Is it really doable?  
                   | • Build on small steps, one at a time. |
| **Relevant**       | • Is this goal worth it?  
                   | • Is the goal aligned with your values?  
                   | • Is the timing right? |
| **Time-Bound**     | • How much time will you spend?  
                   | • How often (daily, weekly, monthly)?  
                   | • How long do you need?  
                   | • Are there any deadlines you have to meet?  
                   | • When will you start? |
Write your goal below:

I will...


Once you finish this exercise, ask yourself the following:

- How do you make the person setting the goal more accountable? Can you call them, or have a team member do so? Is there a way to involve a friend or family member to help them?
- How can you or your team help them to succeed?
- Is it possible to involve someone like a coach or a peer partner for support?

Author(s)

“How to Set a SMART Goal” was adapted for the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program from the original written by J. Adam Rindfleisch, MPhil, MD (2014, updated 2017). Modified for UW Integrative Health 2020.

This tool was made possible through a collaborative effort between the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program, VA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, and Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.