

RAISE YOUR GAME

5 steps to achieving your goal

Take a look at your goals to make sure that, a) they're realistic, and b) you know exactly how to reach them.

1.

Ask Yourself Questions

The first thing you should do is ask yourself some questions that will help you figure out what your goals are. Here are some questions to get you started:

- What do you hope to get out of this?
- Are your expectations realistic?
- When do you want to accomplish your goals?
- How will you measure your success as you go?
- How will you reward yourself when you achieve your goals?

Take a few minutes to think about these questions. Write down your answers and refer to them as you go about setting your goals.

2.

Be Specific

What is your long-term goal? Can it be broken into smaller steps? If you break your long-term objective into "mini goals" that you can accomplish more quickly, you will be more likely to stay motivated and stick with your fitness program. For instance, if you are hoping to lose 20 pounds, you might consider setting the following mini goals:

- Exercise for at least 30 minutes three times each week
- Be able to walk/jog for three miles at the end of six months
- Lose five pounds in one month

Another important thing to think about when setting your goals is your timetable. But be realistic – if you want to drop 10 pounds by next Wednesday or reduce your cholesterol levels significantly before your doctor's appointment in two weeks, you need to reevaluate your timetable. More realistic expectations are losing one to two pounds per week or reducing your cholesterol by 10% for next year's physical.

3.

Write It Down

After you've come up with the specifics of your goals, write them down. Putting your plan on paper will help you commit and will give you something to turn to in a week or a month, when you may begin veering off track. Write down all of your goals (including mini goals) and when you expect to achieve them. Leave room to log your successes and the challenges you face. You can modify your goals and timetable as you go to be more realistic.

Post your goals some place where you will see them often—your bathroom mirror, the refrigerator, your office bulletin board. This will keep you motivated and increase your chances for success.

While you're writing down your goals, make a schedule that you can follow. For example decide how many times a week you will exercise, what time of day will be best for you, and which days of the week work best for your schedule. By having a concrete schedule on paper, you're one step closer to incorporating exercise into your weekly routine.

4.

Measure Your Success

If you don't measure your progress, it will be hard to stay motivated. Schedule regular intervals when you will measure your success. For example, if you are aiming to lose weight, you might log your weight first thing every Monday morning. If you want to build muscle, you can log how much weight you lift each time you workout. As your muscles get stronger, you will be able to lift more weight.

If you are working to bring your blood pressure or cholesterol under control, you can still measure your progress as you go. Instead of heading to your doctor or medic every week for a blood test, log the number of times you exercise in a week or the weight you have lost. Consider these accomplishments as progress toward your ultimate goal. Then, when the doctor gives you the results, you can study your own log and modify it according to your success or failure.

5.

Reward Yourself

Add a little extra motivation to your plan—in the form of rewards. As you set your goals (pounds lost, trips to the gym, extra weight lifted), plan ways to reward your progress. You might consider buying yourself new jeans, treating yourself to a book, or going to a new restaurant you've been wanting to try.

Taking some time to set goals will do wonders to keep you motivated and on the right track. Remember, patience is essential, keep your mind focused on your goal, and enjoy both the pleasure and the benefits that you will gain along the way.