

When people set out to achieve health, wellness, or weight-loss goals, they mistakenly focus on outcomes (i.e., "I want to lose 15 lbs." or "I want to lower my cholesterol."). Successful clients instead focus on ACTIONS—things that they choose to do, perform, or take part in. Well-chosen actions lead naturally to the ultimate outcomes people seek. They are the centerpiece of what wellness coaches call SMART goals. These goals are:

S = Specific. "I want to feel better" is a vague outcome. "I will walk at 3.6 mph for 30 minutes on Monday and Friday" is a specific goal that will likely help you achieve the outcome of "feeling better."

M = Measurable. "I will walk today" is too loose. Does walking to the car, which is 20 feet away, count? "I will walk at 3.6 mph for 30 minutes on Monday and Friday" is a measurable goal—there is nothing vague about it.

A = Actionable. "I will lose 20 pounds" is not an action. Can I look at you and see that you are losing 20 pounds, right at this moment? No. But if you say, "I will walk at 3.6 mph for 30 minutes on Monday and Friday" and it is Monday and I see you on the treadmill, I can see that you are likely on your way to losing that 20 pounds.

R = Realistic. "I will work out for an hour every day this month" is not realistic. If you set your goal too high, and then you don't succeed, you will feel bad about yourself. Set your goal at a reasonable level to make sure you succeed. After all, success breeds success. Achieving even one tiny action goal—perhaps "I will walk at 3.6 mph for 30 minutes on Monday and Friday this week"—will set you up for bigger and better future goals. Always start small.

T = Timed. "I will work out" is not a SMART goal because it has no timeframe. In order to reach a goal, you must have a set time within which you will complete that goal. Set new action goals each week, and make sure your goals can be accomplished by your next goal-setting date.

Now that you know what a SMART goal is, create one that will help you reach an outcome you desire. Use the following as a guide: "I will walk at 3.6 mph for 30 minutes (from 6 to 6 :30 p.m.) on Monday and Friday this week."

My SMART goal:

And remember, stay curious and find something to enjoy about each SMART goal you set!