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## Setting compelling goals

### Great Goal Setting Can Lead To Great Success

“Shoot for the moon and you will be sure to land amongst the stars.”

We all have hopes of accomplishing goals everyday. Some might be as simple as how to sleep as late as we can and still get to work on time; or as detailed as developing a savings plan for a summer vacation in Europe. Every day we subconsciously set goals and go on with our day. Only when we miss an important goal do we tend to make a conscious effort to try a new plan or reset the goal.

Most of us learn to set realistic goals through trial and error. When it comes to weight management, however, most people to set unrealistically high goals or allow someone else do the goal setting for them.

When researchers asked overweight women how much weight they wanted to lose, the women indicated they would need to lose at least 30 percent of their current weight to feel happy. To put this finding in perspective, a woman who is 200 pounds would need to lose 60 pounds before feeling successful. Any dieter will tell you that’s a very big goal. Yet this degree of perfection is what most dieters expect of themselves.

Such lofty goals typically come about because the media deluges us with images of thin beautiful bodies, and implies that all our troubles will melt away if we look lean enough. Although most adults know there is really no truth to the media message that beauty and thinness equal happiness, many of us secretly believe it. This “magic” thinking makes us vulnerable to picking unrealistic weight goals. Rather than causing us to reevaluate the message, the sense of frustration we experience when we can’t meet these unrealistic goals often causes us to abandon our weight loss plans entirely.

Unrealistic goals, such as wanting to look like a model or lose 50 pounds in a month, aren’t the only weight-loss roadblocks people unintentionally construct for themselves. Setting the wrong goal or tying a realistic goal to an unrealistic expectation are other common goal-busting behaviors.

### tools for success

- Determine if your goals and standards are realistic.
- Identify specific, observable behaviors or criteria you can use to determine if a goal is met.
- Identify your commitment level (“What am I willing to do?”) and roadblocks (“What is stopping me?”).
- Learn to establish a contract for behavior change within a specified time frame.

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Julie tried numerous diets. They all worked and she always lost weight. In the end, though, she repeatedly regained the weight. Julie always tied her weight-loss goal to the need to look good for a special occasion such as a class reunion or family wedding. When the occasion was over, so too was Julie's resolve. "The OPTIFAST behaviorist helped me see beyond the social event. She taught me to set a goal for long-term personal wellness, not weight loss. She also helped me investigate why I needed to struggle with my weight in my life in order to stay motivated."

There is an important lesson here. Julie was successful in reaching her goal but it was too short-term to provide the motivation she needed in order to maintain a healthy weight long-term. By refocusing her weight loss goal in terms of lifelong wellness, Julie was able to work towards long-term success.

In other cases, people consciously or unconsciously focus on controlling their weight as a substitute for addressing an underlying issue, such as a marital problem, work issue, etc. Once they realize that being thinner has not cured their problem, they often abandon their efforts to lead a healthier lifestyle and the pounds pile on.

This module focuses on proven techniques for enhancing your goal setting skills. These same skills will serve you well in weight loss, in business, and in other aspects of your personal life. By enrolling in an OPTIFAST Program you have already set the challenging goal of long-term weight management and have taken a significant step toward meeting this goal. Not every technique presented may fit you. It's important to identify the goals you are willing to work for. Chances are good you'll make faster progress towards your weight management goals if you do.

### Great Goal Setting Strategies

There are many proven techniques that can help you set better goals. The best approach for you depends on what you are trying to achieve and

the time frame you have to accomplish it in.

- **Be realistic** – Set yourself up to succeed by choosing goals you can achieve. Success builds confidence.
- **Be specific** – Instead of saying "This year I'll start exercising," try saying, "This month I will walk 4 times a week for 30 minutes each time." Now you have a distinct goal you can measure your progress against and see results.
- **Reality check** – Would you expect a close friend or relative to be able to achieve the goal(s) you set for yourself? If not, you may be setting unrealistic goals.
- **Be forward thinking** – Many of us master short-term goals easily but find it difficult to stay focused enroute to achieving a long-range objective. One of the best ways to create the future you envision for yourself is to think like you have already achieved your goal.
- **Live in the future** – Take a few minutes every day to visualize yourself successfully living your goal. Begin by picking a date in the future. Imagine that you have lost 15 percent of your current body weight. Keeping your mind in the future, talk to yourself in the present. Experience the sights, sounds, and sensations of your goal as if you had already achieved it. Next, ask "How did I get here?"
- **Think backwards** – Keeping your mind in the future, think backwards. Visualize each step along the way. What obstacles did you encounter? How did you overcome them?
- **Move forward** – Now that your mind is back in the present, turn your thoughts into a series of forward moving goals:
  1. Divide a long-term goal into smaller more manageable steps.
  2. Anticipate obstacles you may encounter.
  3. Develop realistic plans for overcoming obstacles.

Use three basic goal setting strategies be realistic, be specific and set deadlines to develop each goal along the way to your long-term objective. Keep a diary to help you envision and set motivating goals. One of the biggest



roadblocks to success is failing to anticipate obstacles and how to detour around them. Ask yourself, "What is going to stop me from losing weight?" Then ask, "How can I overcome these obstacles?" Prepare for the worst and expect the best!

Periodically evaluate and adjust your plan. Keep in mind your anticipated obstacles and be prepared to either go through them or around them. Learning how to cope with, manage, or ignore obstacles is crucial for your success.

Build in food-free rewards for yourself throughout the weight-loss process. Don't tie these rewards to losing a certain amount of weight, but instead link them to carrying out new lifestyle habits you want to reinforce for the long-term. Rewards are a great motivator and are also an excellent reminder to stay goal-centered and not weight-centered.

Stay the course. If you slip off track, try again! Learn from your lapses. Ask yourself two questions after any lapse: "What did I do well?" "What will I do differently the next time?"

## S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting Test

When first set, your goals may seem perfect. But, before trying to achieve them, test them. If they doesn't pass the S.M.A.R.T. test, you need to revise them.

- **Specific** – Make your goals specific. General goals can't be evaluated.
- **Measurable** – State your goal in terms that can be measured, minutes exercised, number of days you write down what you eat, etc. Measurable goals can be evaluated.
- **Attainable** – Set goals that not yet reached, but also not out of sight. "This week I will walk 5 minutes longer per session than last week."
- **Realistic and relevant** – Pick a goal that is relevant. "I want to lose 20 pounds so I can cut back on my medication for my diabetes."
- **Tied to a deadline** – Time limits motivate people to get the job done. "I have until next Friday to clean out the spare room. That's when my sister is

coming for a visit." If you find yourself struggling with weight loss, try limiting the amount of time you will aggressively work on weight loss. Then give yourself a break and focus on stabilizing your weight.

## Overcoming Weight-Loss Obstacles

**Finding a flexible yardstick** – Setting reasonable goals is an important weight management skill. But even reasonable goals, if harshly applied, can make you miserable. Suppose you've been a couch potato for many years when you suddenly decide to exercise every day after work. At the end of the first week you find you met your goal only twice. Do you beat yourself up for the three days you missed or celebrate the two days you exercised and revise your goal for next week?

If you pick the half-empty approach and berate yourself, you'll feel like a failure and may give up exercise altogether. If, on the other hand, you pick the half-full approach you'll feel good about yourself which can generate the positive momentum needed to carry your weight loss efforts toward your goal.

Some people let their weight loss efforts fall apart when they "take the first bite." Learning to stay the course by taking the half-full approach to life is an essential skill in mastering weight management.

**Scaling back** – Gaining perspective on that metal monster known as the scale is another necessary skill. Over the long-term, the scale can be a guide to your overall progress. However, it should not be used to give you day-to-day feedback about your progress. Body weight changes caused by the foods or beverages you have consumed, the medications you may be taking, the temperature index and humidity levels where you live, or any hormonal changes you are experiencing can all affect the numbers you see on the scale.

If your weight is lower than you predicted, the scale can give you a false sense of security. It can also be discouraging for those who seem to gain or remain the same weight despite the fact they are consistently making healthier lifestyle choices. Rather than focus on the numbers, look at how you are incorporating various lifestyle changes into your routine. Small changes in behavior, consistently applied, will eventually yield the results you are after. Keeping a Start\* Stop\* Keep Journal (see the Journaling module for details on



creating one), or using a personal daily diary that lists the behavior changes you plan to make and notes on how well you did, can give you important feedback about your progress. Perhaps the numbers on the scale didn't drop this week, but you followed through on your exercise and food plan. Great! You accomplished your goal!

**Setting up support** – Weight management can be difficult enough without having to work around non-supportive relatives, friends and co-workers. As the saying goes "You are where your head is at." It is difficult to keep a "can do" frame of mind if your attempts to lead a healthier lifestyle are continuously undermined. If you can't find support in your own peer group look to develop it elsewhere. Find a successful weight manager associated with the OPTIFAST® Program you attend to mentor you, or join an internet support group. Visit the OPTIFAST web site ([www.OPTIFAST.com](http://www.OPTIFAST.com)) regularly for weight management tools and inspiration, or look to the OPTIFAST clinic team for support and gradually develop friendships with people who lead a healthy lifestyle.

**Managing urges** – Urges can be compared to waves. Waves begin small, build to a crest, then break on a beach. Similarly, an urge starts small, builds in intensity and usually passes. If you are being hit by an urge wave, you can fight it and risk injury or drowning, or you can keep your balance and 'surf' it until it subsides. You can give in which can make you feel worse in the end or you can decide to approach it calmly and ride it out or "surf" it. Urge 'surfin'g is one way to

ride out the pull to participate in an unhealthy behavior. The keys to success are to recognize high-risk situations that can lead to an urge, and to have a series of coping skills to help you 'surf' the urge.

You may not be able to identify the feelings triggering your desire to eat when you aren't hungry. All you may know is you "feel like chocolate." Be patient with yourself and also be persistent in asking yourself what am I feeling right now? If all that comes to mind is chocolate, then ask yourself again and again until you come up with a feeling like boredom, loneliness, anger or anxiety.

You may persistently find it difficult to name your feelings. Some dieters have spent so many years "drowning" their feelings with food that they truly feel numb. With practice, you'll begin naming the feelings that in the past were identified only by the urge to eat. Once you are able to name your feelings, you'll be able to come up with actions to take instead of eating.

This module has presented a number of different techniques for setting and achieving effective goals. Like all skills, goal setting needs to be practiced in order for it to become second nature. Be patient with yourself. If setting long-range goals seems too challenging, start small and build on success. Begin by setting a goal of spending 30 minutes a day on healthy lifestyle activities. Use this time to become more physically active and also to review the materials you used in group this week.

## key goals

Using the tips in this module, develop 2 – 3 goals to work towards.

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