

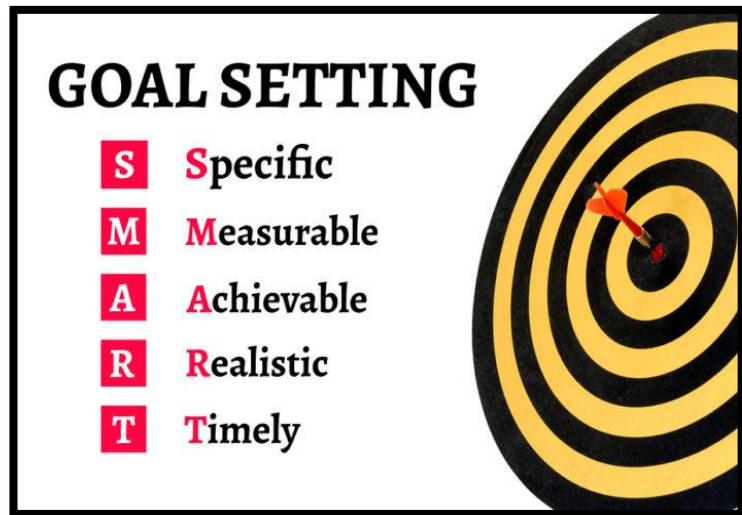


## The Science of Health, Nutrition and Fitness

### Maintaining Your Diet

Author: Carl Conroy

The New Year is once again upon us and with that a plethora of New Year's resolutions will have been made. Many new year's resolutions relate to health and many will relate to new diet plans in order to lose weight. According to 'YouGov.UK (2018) 48% of 2017 New Year's resolutions involved 'losing weight', 31% involved 'improving diet' and 41% involved 'improving health'. Of those individuals surveyed almost 22% of the individuals did not manage to keep their resolutions.



Keeping a New Year resolution is much like keeping up any goal. Using goal setting methodologies it is possible to increase your chances of achieving your resolution 'aims'. So let's apply SMART principles to our new year's resolutions.

'SMART' is an acronym used by psychologists to apply a set of principles to an individual's goals. The SMART principle allows a more accurate identification of the goal parameters. SMART stands for:

- S** – Specific
- M** – Measurable
- A** - Achievable
- R** - Relevant
- T** - Time Phased

### Specific

Goals or aims, must be clearly identified if they are to be fully understood by the person who is adopting them. So 'specific' implies that you must state 'exactly' what you hope to achieve within your goals. If goals are non-specific or too broad then the lines as to whether you can achieve or indeed have achieved that goal is 'greyed'.

For example, a non-specific or broad goal may be 'to lose weight in 2017'. This non-specific goal does not detail vital factors such as how much weight/ by when? Or by what method?

A far better and more specific goal might be 'to lose 14lb's in 6 months using a low fat, low carbohydrate diet'. This specific goal gives you clear guidelines for achievement and also details the method by which you hope to achieve that goal. The loss of 14lb's in the 6 month period would be your 'long term' goal. You can also break that long term goal down into specific medium and short term goals to further detail the 'path' you wish to follow.

## **Measurable**

Any goal should have recordable or measurable strategies for assessing whether that goal is negatively failing or positively advancing. If there is no clear method of goal measurement then how can an individual determine the effectiveness of the short, medium and long term outcomes? By understanding the status of the goal, in terms of progression or regression; an individual can adapt the goal to more fully meet its requirements.

For example, in the case of diet you could measure and record, calories consumed, exercise undertaken (calories expended), weight loss or weight gain. By understanding these variables and adapting them as necessary, the goal can be kept on a positive forward path.

## **Achievable**

Where most goals will generally fail is when they are 'set' too high or have unrealistic expectations. Within the scope of health, diet and the human organism there are physiological and psychological parameters that can affect the goal outcome. It would be nonsensical to set a highly advanced goal for an individual who has no prior experience in a particular area. For example, you would not expect an individual who has never run a marathon before; to achieve a time under three hours in their first 6 months of training.

Diet and exercise are much the same in those terms. Any goals set must have real expectations of weight loss, exercise parameters and time phases. Your goal must allow 'sufficiency' in all of these areas if the goal is to be perceived as 'achievable'.

## **Relevant**

A goal must have some relevance to the person who is undertaking that goal. In the case of a person wishing to lose weight this relevance is obvious. The relevance can be further expanded upon if there are health implications such as obesity, diabetes or heart disease. The relevance of the weight loss goal for that individual is now increased. That relevance can motivate the individual to try and achieve their goals. Motivation is often the key behind a successful exercise or dietary program.

## **Time Phased**

Anything we do in life has a time constraint. By setting time constraints or deadlines tasks can be completed with greater efficiency. Goals should have clearly identified time allocations if they are to be more effectively applied. So for example, if an individual's goals are to lose 12lbs of body fat over a 3 month period; time factors could include monthly reviews of weight loss; perhaps stipulation of amounts of weight to be lost each monthly period. By providing time phased approaches it is easier to determine whether a goal has a negative or positive trend.

The SMART principle is an effective goal setting and hence New Year resolution tool. So by all means set yourself a resolution. But ensure you provide maximum chance of success by planning that resolution using the above rules and principles.

## **References**

MD Anderson Cancer Centre (2018) When setting diet and exercise goals, be SMART. <https://www.mdanderson.org/>

SPORTSMIND (2018) SMARTER Goals: How to Make Your Goals Achievable. <http://www.sportsmind.com.au/index.php>

YouGov.UK (2018) Britain Resolves To Be Healthier in 2017. <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017>