

Making Plans with Pain

Effective goal setting is a skill and requires a bit of practice.

Having chronic pain can lead to a reduction in confidence to plan and commit to in planned activities. You may have felt worse after doing things you previously enjoyed or needed to cancel because your pain was worse on that day. You may fear to disappoint again and try and manage such "failures" by avoiding to plan and set goals and do things according to your pain levels on the day.

Although understandable, this unfortunately tends to lead to "pain in charge" and gradual worsening of pain and function over time. Therefore we want to focus on your values, passions and skills and ensure they are part of your daily life despite pain. If you would like to be more engaged with others or activities then goal setting will help determine the specifics of WHAT you want to do more and HOW to tackle this.

A Five-Step Plan for Goal Setting and Committed Action

Step 1. Identify Your Guiding Values

Identify the value or values that will underpin your course of action (you can refer to your values assessment form, if needed).

Step 2. Set a SMART goal

It's not effective to set any old goal that springs to mind. Ideally, you want to set a SMART goal. Here's what the acronym means:

S= specific (Do not set a vague, fuzzy goal like, 'I'll be more loving'. Instead, be specific: 'I'll give my partner a good, long hug when I get home from work'. In other words, *specify* what actions you will take.)

M = meaningful (Make sure this goal is aligned with important values.) And, **measurable**.

A = adaptive (Is this goal likely to improve your life in some way?)

R = realistic (Make sure the goal is realistic for the resources you have available. Resources you may need could include: time, money, physical health, social support, knowledge and skills. If these resources are necessary but unavailable, you will need to change your goal to a more realistic one. The new goal might actually be to find the missing resources: to save the money, or develop the skills, or build the social network, or improve health, etc.)

T = time-framed (Put a specific time frame on the goal: specify the day, date and time — as accurately as possible — that you will take the proposed actions.)

So, imagine that your pain is 20% better than it is presently, and consider what change you will embrace over the next three months. Then, consider the steps you will need to take to get there.

Write your SMART goal(s) here:

Dates achieved	
	My goal for the next three months:
	My small steps to getting there: 1. 2. 3. 4.

Step 3. Identify Benefits

Clarify for yourself, what would be the most positive outcome(s) of achieving your goal? Write the benefits below:

Step 4. Identify Obstacles

Imagine the potential difficulties and obstacles that might stand in the way of you achieving your goals, and how you will deal with them if they arise.

Consider:

- a) what are the possible internal difficulties (difficult thoughts and feelings, such as fear of increased pain, low motivation, self-doubt, distress, anger, hopelessness, insecurity, anxiety, etc.)?
- b) what are the possible external difficulties (things aside from thoughts and feelings that might stop you, e.g. lack of money, lack of time, lack of skills, personal conflicts with other people involved)?

If internal difficulties arise in the form of thoughts and feelings, such as:

then I will use the following mindfulness skills to unhook, make room and get present:

If external difficulties arise, such as:

a) _____

b) _____

then I will take the following steps to deal with them:

a) _____

b) _____

Step 5. Make A Commitment

Research shows that if you make a public commitment to your goal then you are far more likely to follow through on it.