

Chapter 4

Set SMART goals

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When you're in pain, it's easy for the pain to become the center of your attention. Things in life that were important to you, or that you were trying to achieve, may take a back seat to the pain.

Setting goals helps divert your attention from your pain, providing an opportunity to think about your lifestyle and what you can do to better manage your pain. Goals also give you something to strive for.

But goal setting isn't as easy as it may sound. You simply can't identify a couple of things you want and expect them to occur. You'll only be setting yourself up for disappointment.

The key is to set goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and trackable (SMART):

Specific. State exactly what you want to achieve, how you're going to do it and when you want to achieve it. To begin with, set goals that you can achieve within a week to a month. It's easy to give up on goals that take too long to reach. If you have a big goal, break it down into a series of smaller weekly or daily goals. After you achieve one of the smaller goals, move on to the next.

Measurable. A goal doesn't do you any good if there's no way of telling whether you've achieved it. "I want to feel better" isn't a very good goal because it's not specific and it's difficult to measure. "I want to work 8 hours each day" is a better goal because it's specific and measurable.

Attainable. Ask yourself whether the goal is within reasonable reach. For instance, completing a marathon may not be an achievable goal if you've never run before. However, completing a 5K run may be attainable.

Realistic. Is the goal realistic for you? The purpose of a goal is to shift your focus from your pain to your future. But you can't ignore your limitations. Your goals need to be within your capabilities. If you've suffered a serious back injury, a goal of returning to work as a bricklayer may not be realistic. Instead, your goal might be to find a sales job in a related field. Or you might decide to go back to school for training in a new field.