

Goal setting 101

You're just six steps away from creating goals that will stick for life – not just for January!



What better time to reset, recharge and resolve to live your best life than the New Year? Those very words suggest a fresh start and a chance to think about creating new patterns and habits, especially if your holiday celebrations have veered towards the indulgent side!

Enter the New Year's resolution – the promise that this year you'll eat healthily, drink less, exercise more and face the coming year with a positive outlook.

The problem with New Year's resolutions is that they are easy to make, but hard to keep. US research shows that just nine per cent of those who made resolutions felt they'd been successful.

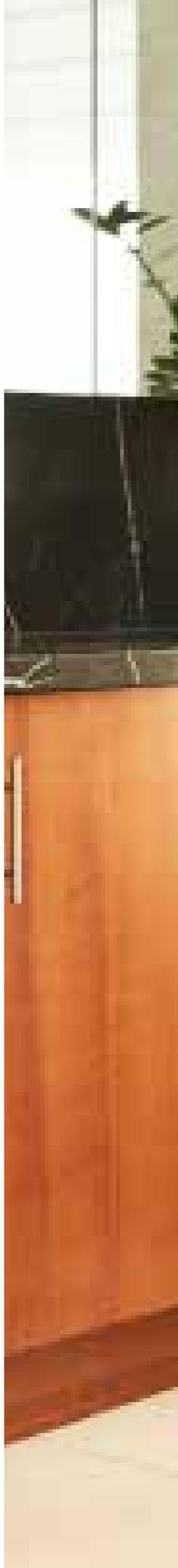
A more powerful, sustainable approach to creating lasting change is to set goals that help you work out what you want, how you're going to get there, and measure whether you're hitting your targets.

"It's important to set clear goals to keep us on track and help us to identify the behaviours that are going to help us progress," says Queensland-based psychologist Dr Samantha Clarke, who did her PhD on successful goal setting.

"It is equally important to create an action plan, or a step-by-step guide, so you can set tasks and review your goal in a set period of time. This will help you to assess the barriers if you want to reset the goal."

You've probably heard of SMART goals – the kind that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and have a Time frame. This approach has been shown by research to be one of the most reliable ways to make lasting changes and is the basis of the Weight Watchers approach to setting targets for members.

So if you want to make lasting healthy lifestyle changes, here's our six-step guide to setting goals that will take you through January and beyond. >





**WW COACH
STEPHANIE RALPH**

“When I joined WW I had no idea where my health journey would take me,” Stephanie says. “My goal was to lose weight and have more energy, but as I went along my goals changed. I became a WW Coach, which is one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done.”

TRICKY TRAPS

If possible, avoid these common pitfalls on the path to Goal success, says WW Diamond Coach Marie Elliott.

EXPECTING PERFECTION

Many members join WW with the unrealistic idea that they will not slip up or eat anything that doesn't support their goals. “Unfortunately, when they do, they are very disappointed with themselves, which can lead to feelings of failure and giving up,” says Elliott.

HOPING TO SEE LARGE LOSSES EVERY WEEK

Weight loss does not come in perfect 1kg increments, sadly! Your progress will seesaw a little and it's important to expect some blips along the way.

COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHER MEMBERS

This can lead to feelings of inadequacy, rather than pride in the goals you do meet, says Elliott. “Focusing on your own journey and how much you have achieved promotes feelings of happiness and the right mindset to continue on your path to Goal,” she says.

“Everyone is different, and everyone loses weight in a different manner. Your age, your gender, how much weight you need to lose and how much activity you do all make a difference.”



two

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION

Whether you want to become fitter or lose 10kg, identifying what you want to achieve is important because we all need signposts to work towards, especially in weight loss. But these goals need to be specific and to have a time frame. Clarke suggests three months is a good period to work with, even if your overall plan is longer term than that. Aim for no more than two to three targets each time frame, and turn to stats to help you set achievable goals.

“Ask yourself how confident you are out of 100 that you’ll achieve that goal in the time frame you’ve set,” says Clarke. “If you rate yourself below 70 per cent, rework the goal until you feel 70 per cent confident.”

Tip: Try to consider the actual outcome you want, as this will help you identify the behaviours you need to get you there, says Clarke.

three

CREATE A MAP

Now that you have your goal, you need to figure out exactly how you’re going to reach it. Clarke says, “Make an action plan for each goal, listing all the tasks you need to do along the way, and work through these systematically.”

Elliott says the key to successfully meeting goals is to break them down into manageable pieces. “Whatever goal you have set for yourself, be that a certain weight or exercising a set number of times a week, is totally up to you,” she says. “But the best way to get there is by setting small goals. Start with 5kg or set a goal just for the next month.

“For example, on joining Weight Watchers you’ll initially be given two milestone Goals to aim towards – your five per cent and 10 per cent Goal, which reflect your starting weight.

“It is overwhelming to see your Goal weight when you first join, so we need to break it down into little steps.”

Tip: Set goals that you can achieve in the time frame you have set, says Clarke. “Allow yourself to have some wins – it is better to set smaller goals to keep motivation up.”

one

WORK OUT WHAT YOU WANT

Start with a pen and paper, and think about not only your goal but your values too. This helps you have a strong ‘why’, which is motivating at those times when it’s hard to stick with the plan.

“Health goals are far more motivating if they are connected to a deeply important value, or when the activity itself is enjoyable,” says Clarke. “Often looking fit or being a certain size isn’t a motivator that will keep us going long term, but if we tap into values that are internally motivating to us, it is more likely that we’ll sustain our motivation.”

For example, having enough energy to go on bike rides with your kids or be fitter so you can hike with your partner is more likely to sustain your motivation than just looking good.

Tip: Create goals that move you towards something you care about, rather than avoiding something you don’t like. “This is more likely to lead to increased flexibility and creativity in how you manage the goal,” says Clarke.

four

WRITE IT DOWN

Committing your goal to paper – or smartphone – is an essential part of achieving your objectives, as it helps you stay on track. “Writing things down and scheduling with a calendar and diary is so important to ensure we are working towards each task that makes up the goal. It helps us stay on track,” says Clarke.

Tip: Sharing your goal with someone supportive like a WW Coach can help you achieve it.



five

CELEBRATE WINS, BIG AND SMALL

Give yourself a pat on the back at each point in the journey that you notch up a win. “Nothing breeds success like success itself, so the more a member feels like they are accomplishing, the more they will want to achieve, both on and off the scales,” Elliott says.

“At WW it’s also important to celebrate off-scales victories. If you’re a person who has never exercised before, aiming for and achieving a goal as simple as going for two walks in a week is a success worthy of celebration and a bit of a fuss.”

Tip: Visualise the goal and the value it has to you. When you’re completing each step, keep in mind that this small task is important to achieving the overall goal. “You can enhance your motivation for small tasks if you link them to the value you really care about,” says Clarke.

six

REVIEW YOUR JOURNEY

Once you’ve passed the time period you set for yourself, assess how you went with meeting your goals. This helps you solve any problems that arose and to reset your next steps, says Clarke.

“It’s very important to acknowledge each step along the way,” she adds. “This will reinforce your behaviour, particularly if you link each task to your goal and then to your value.”

Reflecting on what didn’t go so well is also essential in identifying and addressing any hurdles along the way to your goal.

Tip: Use your calendar or phone to remind yourself to revisit your goal.

WELL DONE!

And remember, it’s not only about the numbers on the scales with weight loss. Elliott says Weight Watchers helps members to look at success in a broader way, such as through the foods they are choosing, or how they are incorporating activity into their lives, or even the way they think and feel about themselves.

“We also encourage members to measure themselves so they are not only using the scales as a way of judging their success,” she says.

PLAY IT SMART

Elliott’s guide to making goal setting work for you

SPECIFIC:

What exactly are the goals you want to achieve?

MEASURABLE:

How will you know that you are achieving them? What does success look like in meeting your goals?

ACHIEVABLE:

We all want to lose a kilo a week every week, but is that achievable for you? What kind of lifestyle do you have? Do you do lots of socialising and will you be able to continue the lifestyle you enjoy with the goals that you have set?

REALISTIC:

Weight gain can happen over a period of time, so we need to realise that it’s not going to come off overnight either. “It is going to take time, and that’s okay! Every kilo you lose and every new healthy habit that you create are all helping you achieve the end result,” says Elliott.

TIMELY:

A time frame keeps you accountable and gives you something to aim for.