

Goals, Goals and More Goals

By [Charles Stuart Platkin](#)
For Active.com

The holidays are behind us, and now we face the inevitable--diet season. Yes, it's a vicious cycle. We eat as if there were no tomorrow; then, when the holidays are over, we awaken from our food coma and realize we need to lose a few (pounds, that is).

We rush to the bookstore in search of an answer, or listen to the latest diet guru, who offers us some miracle-of-the-moment, hoping, just hoping, it will make us fit. However, if you're like most of us, you'll end up falling prey to the neon doughnut and fast-food signs, as well as the many unhealthy food ads on TV. If you've been there, done that, how about doing something different this year: Set some goals.

Goal setting is critical to accomplishing any task. Is it possible to reach a goal without having a plan? Maybe. But if you want to significantly tip the odds in your favor, setting goals helps. In fact, a study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* reported that good goal setting increases your chances of reaching your diet objective by 84 percent.

Keep in mind, goals need to be specific (i.e., how much weight do you want to lose), motivating (interesting enough for you want to achieve them), achievable (realistic) and rewarding (worth having when you reach them). Strategies need to be tactical (i.e., you have a real plan), easy to evaluate, and revisable (if they are not working). Visit <http://www.dietdetective.com/content/view/1326/156/> for more goal-setting tips.

All your goals and strategies should follow the guidelines above, but you still need to break them down into micro (in the moment), short-term (one to six months), midterm (six months to two years) and long-term (two to five years).

Overall and Long-Term Goals

Setting your long-term goal is your first decision. It's the equivalent of picking a location for your next vacation. In order to start the planning process, you need to know where you're going.

Micro, Short-term and Midterm Goals

Micro goals are about deciding that the next time you go to the fridge you will reach for the mustard instead of the mayonnaise.

Short-term and midterm goals are those that get you to your long-term objective, the ones you meet "along the way." They should keep you excited, motivated and on-target, and they should provide achievable objectives that bring you closer to your long-term goal.

You should start feeling good about your decision to lose weight right from the beginning. To help you do that, start each week by choosing a micro goal you can meet within the next seven, 10 or 14 days. If you eat out frequently you might decide that one of the restaurants you eat in next week will feature low-cal fish dishes. Or your goal might be to eat out only twice a week. Or maybe you want to try a new cardio-sculpt class at the gym.

It's also important to break down your short-term and midterm goals into categories to help you track the various aspects of your long-term goal. Weight control involves a variety of issues including food choices, behavioral and psychological choices and physical activity. Take a look at each of the categories below to give you a starting point for setting your goals.

Food Choices

Think about how your eating habits are preventing you from losing weight. With this in mind, set one or two food goals to work on each week.

For example:

- I will not skip meals this week.
- I will not snack on candy in the afternoon. Instead, I will have fruit or a bowl of low-calorie cereal.
- I will have wine with dinner only three nights this week, and I will keep it to one glass.

Behavioral and Psychological Issues

What is it about your lifestyle--or the way you think about yourself, food or exercise--that is a barrier to weight loss? With this in mind, set one or two behavioral/psychological goals to work on each week.

Some examples:

- I will eat only at the dining table when I'm at home. When I am tempted to eat in other areas, I will remind myself of my long-term goals and feel better about myself. (Eating in just one or two places helps to narrow the number of spots in your home that you associate with eating.)
- I will not watch TV while eating. (Not doing anything else while you eat allows you to focus so that you're aware of how much you're eating and actually enjoy it more.)

Physical Activity

Developing physical activity goals is imperative for any effective weight-loss program. These goals should be realistic very specific in terms of how long, how much and how hard you exert yourself. Remember that to lose a pound you need to cut roughly 3,500 calories. So if, for example, your objective is to lose 30 pounds in a year, and you're cutting an average of 200 calories a day from your diet, you might want to make up the difference (about 90 calories), by doing an additional 20 minutes of physical activity each day.

Some examples of activity goals:

- I will walk 15 minutes during my lunch break three times a week.
- I will walk up the three flights of stairs to my office every morning.
- I will ride go bike riding with my daughter on Saturday and Sunday mornings.
- I will institute a "no e-mail" policy from 2 to 4 p.m. and walk over to my co-workers' desks to communicate.
- I will run a 5K one year from today.

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Charles Stuart Platkin is an [Active Expert](#), nutrition and public health advocate, author of the best seller Breaking the Pattern (Plume, 2005), Breaking the FAT Pattern (Plume, 2006) and Lighten Up (Penguin USA/Razorbill, 2006) and founder of Integrated Wellness Solutions. Sign up for The Diet Detective newsletter free at www.thedietdetective.com.