Setting Goals

Pain management is different for every person. When planning how your chronic pain will be managed, you and your healthcare professional have a lot of things to consider. Your healthcare professional may be a physician, a physician’s assistant, or a nurse practitioner. He or she may work in a small practice or as part of a large group. Your healthcare professional may also be part of a larger pain management team working to help you manage your pain. This team of healthcare professionals may include physicians, specialists, nurses, therapists, and pharmacists. Information on communicating with your pain management team is available in Fact Sheet 13 of the Emerging Solutions in Pain Patient Education Series.

Your treatment plan will be tailored specifically for you, based on things such as how your pain began, whether your pain is being caused by an underlying disease, and the combination of treatments including non-drug therapies and pain medications that may be right for you. For information on the different types of pain medications, see Fact Sheet 2 of the Emerging Solutions in Pain Patient Education Series.

One important consideration is the level of function you had before your pain began, and the level of function you hope to regain as a result of your pain treatment. Just as every person has a unique pain management program, every person has their own goals of what they expect from their treatment. Setting well-defined goals that are realistic, challenging and attainable is a key to your treatment success.
Six steps to achieving your personal goals

There are six steps you can follow to achieve your personal pain management treatment goals. They are*:

1. **Assess**—take an honest look at your current beliefs and behaviors regarding your treatment, and your commitment and confidence in making a change for the better.

2. **Advise**—get information from your pain management team about the potential risks and benefits of treatment, and the goals they believe are appropriate for you.

3. **Agree**—set goals that reflect your own personal motivation and commitment, as well as what your team believes is possible for you to achieve.

4. **Assist**—with the help of your pain management team, identify the barriers that may make it difficult for you to achieve your goals, and learn problem-solving techniques that can help you overcome those barriers.

5. **Arrange**—set a specific plan for following up with your pain management team on a regular basis.

6. **Adapt**—take each day as it comes. You will have good days and bad days. Be flexible as you may have more pain on some days.

*Adapted from [3]

By following these six steps, you will create a personal pain treatment plan that lists your treatment goals; the barriers to reaching those goals; how you can overcome them; and how and when you will follow up with your healthcare team to share your plan and progress. Having a personal treatment plan in place will give you the confidence you need to help manage your pain. This confidence will give you the motivation you need to succeed in putting your plan into action. And succeeding in putting your plan into action can help improve the outcome of your treatment.
Be **SMART** about setting your goals

SMART goals are the most effective goals, and are most likely to help make your treatment plan a success. They are smart because they are written in a way that helps you take action and make your goals a reality. SMART goals are:

- **Specific**—each goal must describe a specific action or step, like “walk around the block” instead of “take a walk.”
- **Measurable**—each goal must have a specific way to evaluate it so you know when it has been reached, like “walk around the block in 30 minutes.”
- **Attainable**—each goal must have your full and complete commitment behind it, like “walk to the next block when I have a pain-free day.”
- **Realistic**—each goal must be possible for you to achieve, given any restrictions or limitations you may have, like “today my pain is worse, so I will walk around the block in 45 minutes.”
- **Tangible**—each goal must have a reasonable target date for when you want or hope to achieve it, like “I want to walk five blocks in three months time.”

It can also help to prioritize your goals. Put the most important goals at the top of your list, and those that are important but less urgent, or that depend on attaining another goal beforehand, toward the bottom of your list. Remember, just as your life is constantly changing, so should your goals. Review your list of goals every month. Check off the goals you’ve achieved, modify or keep working on past goals, and add new goals.

**Goals come in many varieties**

Think about how many different interests, desires, wants, and needs you have. You could probably write an entire list of wishes, but first you need to decide what is most important to you and not be too ambitious. Perhaps just being able to get a full night’s sleep may be a realistic starting goal, eventually progressing to having enough energy to walk around the block. Once therapy is well underway, you could consider adding a round of golf, playing the piano, doing some gardening, or swimming a lap or two in the pool.

Progress may be slow and original goals may have to be adjusted from time to time to ones that are more realistic and attainable. That is to be expected and is perfectly okay. The main point is that you want to challenge yourself to improve and grow. Perhaps improvement for you is simply tying your own shoes or, on a day that you are feeling really good, maybe it is walking in those shoes for a couple of blocks. Goals of treatment are as different as responses to treatment. Goal setting is a personal and constantly changing activity.
Below are some goal categories you can think about while making your own list of goals.

- **Physical goals**—getting back to things you love to do, like walking, jogging, bicycling, or going to the gym
- **Recreational goals**—participating in your favorite activities such as gardening, going to the movies, or playing sports
- **Recovery goals**—if you have a history of alcohol or drug abuse, staying sober and/or drug-free may be one of your goals
- **Lifestyle goals**—improving your health and outlook by quitting a habit like smoking, by losing weight, or getting regular sleep
- **Creative goals**—getting your mind off your pain by painting, writing, playing a musical instrument, or taking up a new hobby

**Examples of good goal setting**

Writing goals for your personal pain treatment plan sounds easy, but it can be difficult to write goals that are really SMART. Here are a few examples of well-written goals. Perhaps they are your goals too. Use the spaces on the next page to write your own goals and share them with your pain management team as you develop your personal treatment plan.

**EXAMPLE 1:** “I want to be able to walk my granddaughter to school each morning, a total of four blocks round trip.”

**EXAMPLE 2:** “I want to be able to play nine holes of golf once a month with my friends.”

**EXAMPLE 3:** “I want to do some gardening for 15 minutes each day.”

**EXAMPLE 4:** “I want to take a yoga class at the YWCA/YMCA once a week.”

**EXAMPLE 5:** “I want to attend an AA meeting twice a month to get support to stop drinking.”

**EXAMPLE 6:** “I want to drink less coffee and go to bed at 10 pm every night.”

**EXAMPLE 7:** “I want to join a scrapbooking group to learn a new hobby and attend classes once a week.”
My personal goals for pain treatment

Goal Example
My goal is: I want to play the piano for 15 minutes each day
How I will do it: I will take my medications as prescribed
How I will measure it: I will keep a journal to track the pain in my fingers
How I will achieve it: I will use some heat pads to help the pain in my fingers
I will achieve it by: I will play Happy Birthday for my grandson’s next birthday

Goal #1
My goal is: ____________________________________________
How I will do it: _______________________________________
How I will measure it: __________________________________
How I will achieve it: ___________________________________
I will achieve it by: _____________________________________

Goal #2
My goal is: ____________________________________________
How I will do it: _______________________________________
How I will measure it: __________________________________
How I will achieve it: ___________________________________
I will achieve it by: _____________________________________

Goal #3
My goal is: ____________________________________________
How I will do it: _______________________________________
How I will measure it: __________________________________
How I will achieve it: ___________________________________
I will achieve it by: _____________________________________

Goal #4
My goal is: ____________________________________________
How I will do it: _______________________________________
How I will measure it: __________________________________
How I will achieve it: ___________________________________
I will achieve it by: _____________________________________
The people on my pain management team whom I will ask for support include: __________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Some of the barriers I need to overcome in order to achieve my goals are: ________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

I will overcome these barriers by: __________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

To keep myself motivated and on track in reaching my goals, every day I will tell myself:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

I know I can be successful in reaching my pain treatment goals because: ________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Share the information you’ve written above with your pain management team. Be sure to ask for their advice in identifying barriers that may make it difficult for you to reach your goals, and ask for their suggestions on what you can do to overcome those barriers. If you misstep, remember that nobody is perfect, and see it as an opportunity to adapt and problem solve. Review your goals regularly, and update them as necessary. These goals will help you achieve your pain management treatment objectives.
Although it may not be possible for your pain to resolve completely, with commitment and persistence, you can overcome your pain and lead a happy, productive, and fulfilling life.

There are other fact sheets available in this educational series. Please discuss which may be suitable for you with your healthcare professional.

For additional information about setting pain management goals, visit this resource:

- The Mayo Clinic
  http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/chronic-pain/PN00048

References