

## Setting SMART Goals

Setting goals is one of the first tasks you'll face as you embark upon any diet or exercise program. Although it seems like an easy thing to do (you learned how to set goals in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, right?!), setting appropriate health improvement goals is often very challenging. TV programs like "The Biggest Loser" tout extreme amounts of weight loss in a short period of time, and it is common for people to then expect the same out of themselves. What often happens, though, is people fall short of their lofty, unrealistic goals and then end up throwing in the towel altogether. To avoid that mistake, consider using the acronym S.M.A.R.T. as you set your next goal.

- ✓ **Once you have a goal in mind, put it to the test. Does it meet all of these criteria?**

**S**pecific – Make your goal as detailed as possible; avoid general terms like "feel better" or "lose weight;" a more specific goal might be "Exercise for 20 minutes without stopping" or "Reduce or eliminate my medications."

**M**asurable – State your goal in terms of units that can be measured (e.g., minutes, pounds, ounces, etc.); e.g., "Exercise for 30 min. each day" instead of "exercise more."

**A**ttainable – Choose a goal that is slightly out of reach but not unrealistically high; consider your baseline and ask yourself if a friend/family member could do the same.

**R**ealistic & Relevant – Choose a goal that you can reasonably achieve and one that will be meaningful for years to come; 2-3 pounds per week is realistic; managing chronic diseases like diabetes is much more relevant than losing weight for a vacation or a high school reunion, for example.

**T**ied to a Deadline – Make sure that your goal has a definite endpoint; deadlines motivate us to work on the goal and also help us evaluate our progress.

- ✓ There are many other ways to ensure that you will reach your goals, including thinking proactively about the challenges you may encounter and rewarding yourself for your progress along the way. Start with a SMART goal and you are likely to succeed!