

**Q.** How can I develop healthy habits?

**A.** Learning to develop healthy habits can have a positive impact on your health, happiness, and quality of life. But you need to know where to start to create a SMART<sup>1</sup> plan to help you achieve your goals. Here's how to map out a plan to help you be successful.

**Define Your "Why"**

Before you start creating a to-do list to lose weight, improve blood pressure, eat healthier, or get more exercise, think about why you want to make a change. There's a good chance you already know what you need to do, but you're just not doing it. Defining your "why" can help motivate you to take a step forward.

Why do you want to make a change (e.g. live longer, save money, improve quality of life, set an example for your kids)? What would it mean to you to accomplish your goal?

**Create a SMART Plan**

Once you're clear about why you want to make a change, you can create a SMART plan that will help you develop healthy habits and accomplish your goal.

**Specific**

Be specific about what you want to accomplish. Examples: Lose 10 pounds. Lower your blood pressure by 10 points. Drink 64 ounces of water a day. Exercise for 30 minutes at least three days a week. Get at least seven hours of sleep a night. Identify a specific goal you want to accomplish and are willing to work at to achieve.



**Measurable**

Being able to measure your progress will help you be successful. How many minutes a day will you exercise? How many steps a day will you take? How much water will you drink per day? What is your ideal weight or blood pressure? Define how you will measure your progress and explain the actions you will take to help you reach your goal. For example, a daily weigh-in or food diary can help you track your progress.

**Attainable**

Your goal needs to be attainable. Setting unrealistic goals is the reason why so many people fail at accomplishing New Year's resolutions. Your goals shouldn't be an all-or-nothing effort. Start small and improve from there. If 80 percent of the time you're doing the right thing to attain your goal, you can do the wrong things 20 percent of the time and still move forward without beating yourself up about it.

**Reasonable**

If you don't exercise much right now, but set goal to run a marathon next week, that's probably not going to happen. Your goals need to be reasonable. Is it something you can accomplish within the timeframe you've set, and something you're willing to do? For example, losing 1 to 2 pounds a week is a reasonable goal for most people who need to lose weight. And if you want to exercise at least 30 minutes a day, walking on a treadmill isn't going to work if you hate it. Try walking outside.

**Timelines**

Set timelines for both small and large goals. This will help you develop healthy habits that will last. Define what you will do today, in the next 3 days, 7 days, 30 days, 90 days, and 120 days. Set a date for reaching your ideal weight and commit to taking the necessary actions to get there.

If you really want to develop healthy habits, you can. You need a plan that provides structure, a routine, and repetition of actionable steps to help you be successful. SMART goals can help you do just that.

**References**

1. Hall, D. (2011). *My SMART Health Action Plan* [handout]. Wellsource, Inc., Clackamas, Oregon.

