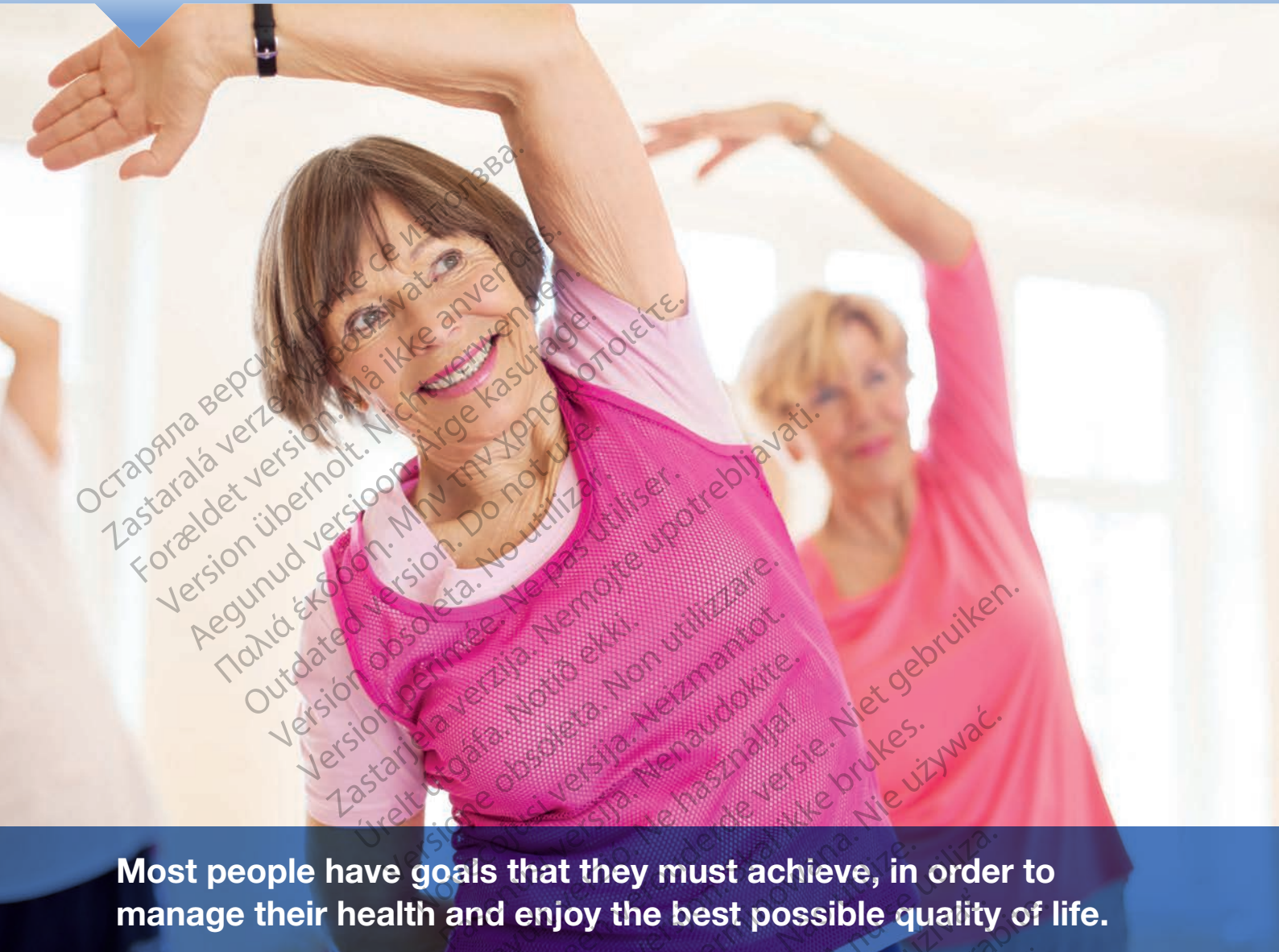


Smart goals



Most people have goals that they must achieve, in order to manage their health and enjoy the best possible quality of life.

You may already have discussed some of these goals with your healthcare team — for example, you may want to lose a certain amount of weight, adopt a healthier diet or give up smoking.

We know that, for people with long-term conditions, setting goals can be associated with benefits¹. Setting goals and monitoring your progress against them can give you focus and direction, put you back in control of your own life and let you see how well you are actually doing, even when you haven't noticed it.

However, we also know that setting goals can present some challenges².

There may be competing priorities to balance, and whenever you have to adapt to change, it can take time to adjust. Luckily, you can often overcome this by sub-dividing big changes and targets (such as 'I will lose 10lbs') into smaller, more manageable chunks (I will lose 1lb by next Thursday, followed by the same target again, and again, and so on). You may also find it helpful to involve your healthcare team in your goal setting.

Using the SMART approach can greatly increase your chances of achieving your goals. Please read on to find out more.

What is SMART goal setting?

SMART is an acronym, and each of the initials stands for a quality that each of your goals must have. There are several versions of SMART, but one of the most useful for healthcare is:



In more detail, this means that when you set goals, each one of them should be:

S

SPECIFIC

This means that you must define exactly what you want to achieve. Think about the what, why, who, where and when. Don't be vague when describing your goal, that defeats the objective. Make sure you commit to achieving something specific, and that you understand exactly where you want to be by the end of the process.



Specific goal: You may plan to walk more. Make it more specific so the plan is clear. For example, you plan to walk 20 minutes at lunchtime Monday through Thursday.

M

MEASURABLE

It is crucial that you can track and measure your outcomes. So ask questions like, how much/how many? How will you know for sure that you have achieved your goal? How could you prove it to other people?



Measurable goal: You need to be able to measure your goals to see your progress. For example, you may want to eat a serving of fruit or vegetable at each meal for one week. If you can mark it on your calendar, you can measure it at the end of the week to see how you were able to increase your fruit and vegetable intake.

A

ACHIEVABLE

Be realistic, and above all make sure that the actions required to achieve your goal are things that you can actually control. If you have a longer-term goal you might find it easier to sub-divide it into several smaller goals, that you can realistically achieve in shorter time-frames without losing focus or motivation.



Achievable goal: For example, you may want to lose 20 pounds, but that takes a lot of hard work and time. You may get discouraged if you have to wait that long to see any positive results. Instead, you might set an attainable goal of losing 1 or 2 pounds in one week by increasing your exercise to 30 minutes 4 times per week and cutting out soda.

R

RELEVANT

Make sure your goals make a clear contribution to your well-being. If in doubt, discuss it with your healthcare professionals.



Relevant goal: Start making choices that will improve your heart health. For example, Eat the white meat of turkey or chicken, which is lower in fat than dark meat, red meat and pork. Start using lean ground sirloin, pork tenderloin instead of high-fat cuts of meat.

T

TIME-BOUND

SMART goals must have a clear deadline, otherwise you can put them off indefinitely (and probably never achieve them).



Time-bound goal: Pick a timeframe for completing your goal. Starting next week, I am going to do some form of cardio for at least 30 minutes, at least 3 days each week. I will commit to this schedule for the next 3 months.



Keep your focus

Once you have established your SMART goals, it is important to make them real, tangible and unavoidable – so write them down, and keep them somewhere visible. Perhaps you could write your SMART goals in your diary, that way you can keep track of your goals and work towards them every week.

Another great way to keep yourself on track to SMART goal success is to build in rewards. Think of ways to reward yourself (that are heart-friendly, of course!) and use them whenever you have a SMART goal success to celebrate.

It is also important that you review your goals regularly and make sure they are still SMART. Things change over time, and keeping your SMART goals under review will give you a better chance of adapting to change and staying as well as possible.



When you understand exactly what you want to achieve, and why, your chances of success are greatly increased. Setting SMART goals helps you to do just that, while giving you focus and motivation.

Remember that keeping a diary can help you track your progress against your SMART goals.

If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.

References

1. Tierney S, Mamas M, Woods S et al. What strategies are effective for exercise adherence in heart failure? A systematic review of controlled studies. *Heart Fail Rev* 2012 Jan; 17 (1): 107-15.
2. Myerson KL, Kline S. Qualitative analysis of a mutual goal-setting intervention in participants with heart failure. *Heart Lung* 2009 Jan-Feb; 38 (1): 1-9.