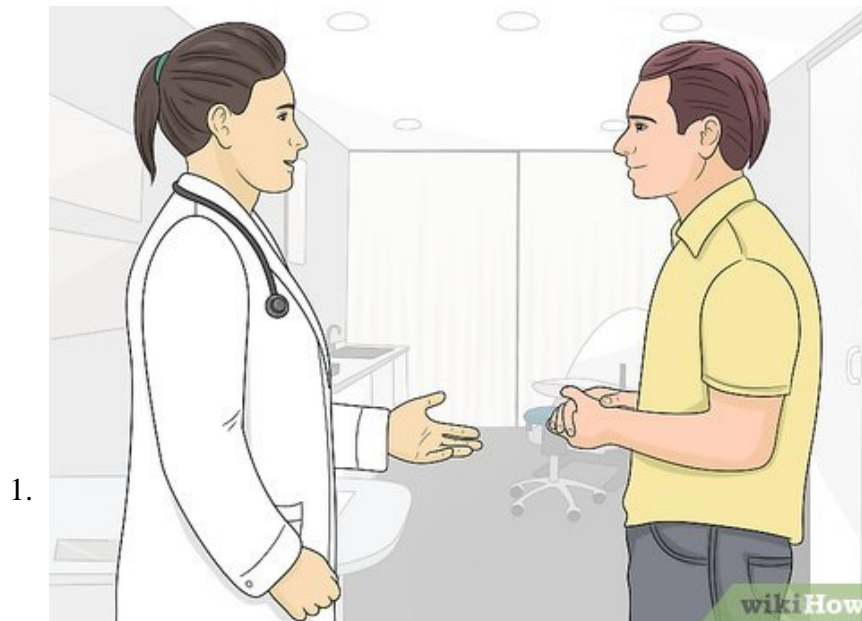


# How to Set Fitness Goals

If you've decided you want to improve your fitness, congratulations! Now it's time to set some clear, realistic, positive fitness goals. Strongly consider consulting your doctor first so that you can develop fitness goals that suit your...

Method 1 of 4:

## Setting Healthy and Safe Goals



**Consult your doctor before setting major health and wellness goals.** Always talk to your doctor before making diet, lifestyle, or physical activity changes if you have pre-existing health conditions or are sedentary. It's possible to skip this step if you're in good health and are making minor changes, but even in this case you'll probably benefit from meeting with your doctor.<sup>[1]</sup>

1. If you're planning to set a major fitness goal, like completing a marathon, always consult your doctor first, no matter your health status.
2. When you make the appointment, simply say something like the following: 'I'd like to set some new fitness goals for myself and could use some guidance.'

2.



**Work on your emotional wellbeing before setting physical fitness goals.** If you're experiencing excessive stress, anxiety, depression, or another type of emotional turmoil, let your doctor know. Unless they advise you otherwise, set and work toward achievable emotional wellbeing goals before starting toward your fitness goals.<sup>[2]</sup>

1. Treat 'emotional fitness' as a primary fitness goal, then let physical fitness flow from that starting point. You'll have a much better chance of achieving your physical fitness goals if your emotional state is in a good place.
2. Depending on your situation, your emotional wellbeing goals might include things like attending therapy sessions, starting a stress-reduction regimen, mending a strained family relationship, or changing jobs.

3.



**Talk to your doctor about prioritizing other lifestyle goals first.** While it's a good thing if you're determined to make a wide range of positive lifestyle changes, you may overwhelm yourself if you set too

many goals at once. Along with improving your emotional wellbeing (if needed), your doctor may recommend that you set one or more of the following goals first:<sup>[3]</sup>

1. Quitting smoking. This is notoriously difficult, and it may be too much to ask for you to achieve this while also working toward physical fitness goals.
2. Stopping illicit drug or excessive alcohol abuse. Like quitting smoking, these can be extremely challenging goals that may overwhelm your fitness goals.
3. Improving the quality of your sleep. This may sound less important and less challenging than quitting smoking, drugs, or alcohol, but it can actually be very difficult. Also, sleeping well is a key companion to physical fitness.



**Adapt general fitness goals to suit your specific circumstances.** Being physically fit means different things to different people, and there's no such thing as 'one size fits all' fitness goals. Your goals should be crafted to fit your needs, which is why your doctor's advice can be so helpful. Therefore, don't be surprised or ashamed if your goals vary from general fitness guidelines.<sup>[4]</sup>

1. For instance, while 150 weekly minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise is a general goal for adults, your circumstances may make a goal of 100 minutes per week both healthier and more achievable.

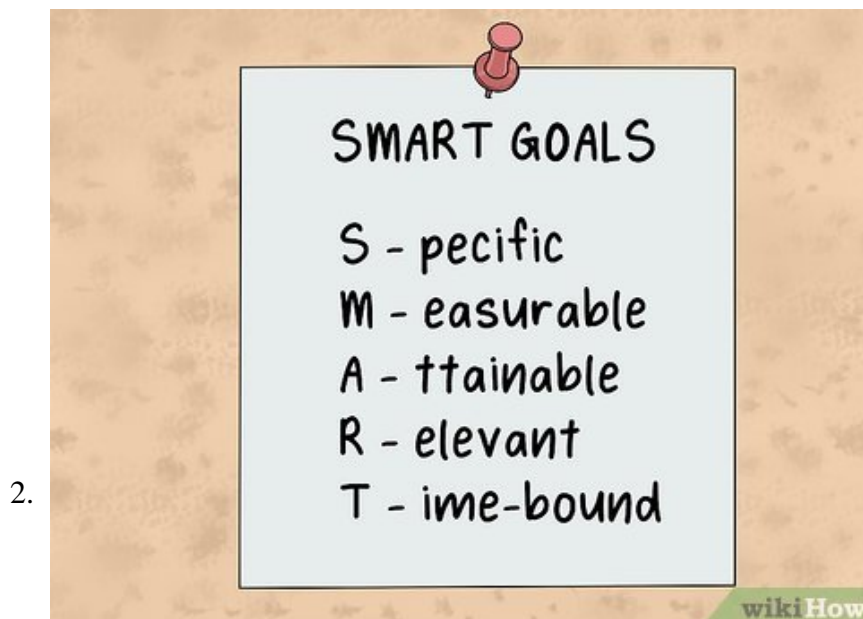
Method 2 of 4:

## Defining Your Goals



**Write a list of 1-3 short-term goals and 1-3 long-term goals.** A goal always seems more 'real' once you put it down on paper. Take a few minutes to sit down and write out 2 sets of goals—short-term goals you want to achieve in around 2-4 weeks, and long-term goals you want to achieve in 6 months to 2 years. For example:<sup>[5]</sup>

1. Short-term goals: I want to walk for 30 minutes after dinner each night; I want to join a yoga class; I want to be able to do 20 push-ups.
2. Long-term goals: I want to complete a half marathon; I want to beat my personal best in lap swimming from 15 years ago; I want to go on hikes with my grandchildren and not hold them back.



**Revise and expand your goals into SMART goals.** If your goals are very vague, like 'I want to get in better shape,' you won't know how to achieve them or how to define success. Instead, look over your short-term and long-term lists of goals and make sure they're SMART, which stands for the following:<sup>[6]</sup>

1. Specific. For instance, 'I want to run 5 mi (8.0 km) per week' instead of 'I want to start running.'

2. **Measurable.** For example, 'I want to add 15 lb (6.8 kg) to my max bench press.'
3. **Attainable.** Running a marathon may not be realistic next month, but maybe it is next year.
4. **Relevant.** For instance, 'I want to swim faster than Todd' may not be as fitness-focused as 'I want to improve my personal best time by 3 seconds.'
5. **Time-bound.** Set a specific, realistic deadline to achieve each goal whenever this is possible. Deadlines provide motivation.



3.

**List likely obstacles and rate your desire to meet these goals.** For each goal you have listed, write down 1 or 2 potential roadblocks. If you can't realistically see yourself overcoming these obstacles, revise that goal. Then rate each goal on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being your maximum desire to achieve. Consider revising or eliminating any goal that isn't at least a 7 on your desire scale.<sup>[7]</sup>

1. If you know you simply don't have the time or resources to become a capable cross country skier this winter, for example, you're just setting yourself up to fail by keeping that as a goal. Perhaps 'I will try cross country skiing this winter' makes more sense.

4.



**Revisit and adjust your goals as needed at least once per month.** Go over all your goals anytime you achieve one of them, or at least once per month otherwise. Cross off ones you've achieved or that are no longer feasible and replace them with new ones. Edit other existing goals as needed if your circumstances have changed.<sup>[8]</sup>

1. Once you start setting and achieving fitness goals, keep going! Set new and different goals that are both SMART and suited to your changing life.

Method 3 of 4:

## Achieving General Adult Fitness Goals

1.



**Don't sit down for more than 30 minutes at a time.** The general guidance is to simply move around more and sit down less, but setting a more specific goal makes it easier to track your progress. After 30 minutes of sitting, stand up and walk around or stretch for 1-2 minutes. After an additional 30 minutes, extend your 'stand up' time to 3-5 minutes. Repeat the process as needed.<sup>[9]</sup>

1. Consider setting a timer on your phone to remind you to get up.
2. If you get up and move around more frequently, all the better! For instance, if you're watching a sporting event on TV, get up and move around during every commercial break.



**Do 150+ minutes of moderate (or 75+ minutes of vigorous) weekly exercise.** During moderate-intensity exercise, you should be able to speak but be breathing heavily enough that you can't easily carry on a conversation and can't sing a song. During vigorous-intensity exercise, you should be breathing heavily enough that simply speaking is a challenge.<sup>[10]</sup>

1. Aim for 150-300 minutes of moderate exercise, 75-150 minutes of vigorous exercise, or a combination of both. For instance, 100 minutes of moderate exercise and 25 minutes of vigorous exercise is equivalent to 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise.
2. Brisk walking is typically considered moderate intensity exercise, while biking at a fast pace is usually considered vigorous intensity exercise.
3. This is the general weekly aerobic exercise goal for healthy adults. Consult your doctor first if you aren't sure you fit in this category.

3.



**Work all major muscle groups with strength training 2+ times weekly.** Use free weights, weight machines, and/or exercise bands to provide resistance as you work all your major muscle groups. A complete strength training workout should typically take 30-60 minutes.<sup>[11]</sup>

1. If you're new to strength training, work with a physical therapist or fitness trainer so you can do the right exercises using the proper technique.
2. As with aerobic exercise, consult your doctor first if you aren't sure you qualify as an 'average healthy adult.'
3. Strength training may cause muscle soreness afterward, but it shouldn't cause pain either during or after your workout. Consult your doctor if you experience pain.

4.



**Adjust your goals based on your age, health status, and other factors.** Fitness goals should always be individualized, so there's a good chance that these general goals aren't right for you. Your smartest option is to work with your doctor to determine the appropriate fitness goals for your circumstances.<sup>[12]</sup>

1. As an older adult, for instance, you may have a lower aerobic exercise goal and be advised to do specific exercises that improve balance.
2. Or, if you're pregnant, you may (or may not) be advised to avoid vigorous aerobic exercise.
3. No matter your situation, physical inactivity should be reduced whenever possible.

Method 4 of 4:

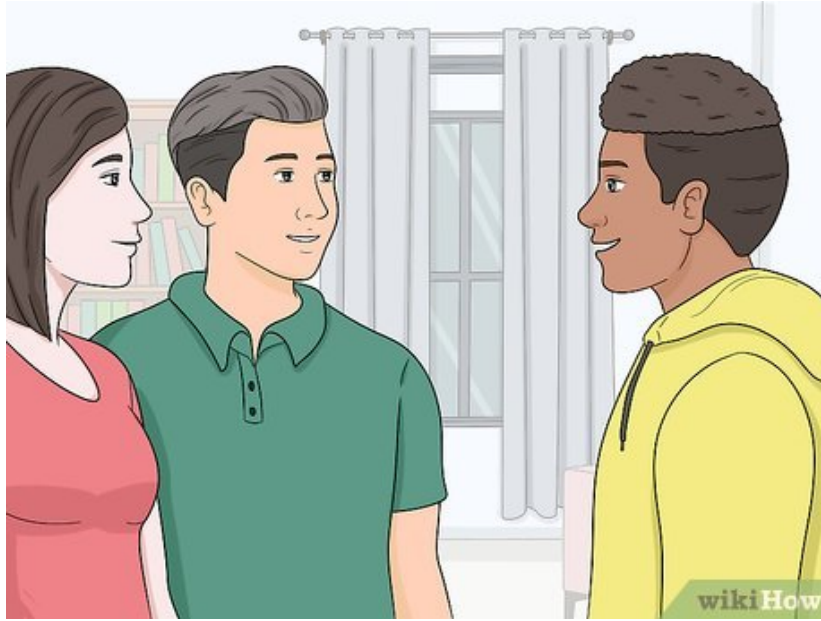
## Staying Motivated



**Set your own goals instead of mimicking others' goals.** It's okay to be inspired by other people's fitness goals, or to be motivated by them. But don't feel like you need to copy or one-up someone else. What's right for them may not be right for you, so focus on setting goals that suit you and are achievable by you. [13]

1. Don't worry about trying to keep up with people at the gym or fitness center who like to brag about their goals and achievements. In the same way, be wary while on social media—people are known to exaggerate!
2. You're just setting yourself up for failure if you try to achieve or exceed someone else's goals.

2.



**Tell supportive friends about your goals so they can help you.** Pick out the most supportive people in your life and let them know about your new fitness goals. Positive encouragement is always welcome when you set a new fitness challenge for yourself. It also adds some extra motivation when people other than yourself know about your goals.<sup>[14]</sup>

1. Celebrate your successes with your friends, and seek support when you come up short. You'll be surprised how helpful a friendly boost can be!
2. Don't feel obligated to tell the naysayers, critics, and pessimists in your life.

3.



**Accept failures as natural and keep moving forward.** If you achieve every fitness goal with ease, your goals aren't challenging enough. You should come up short sometimes, and that's perfectly okay. Revise your goal if needed, and re-dedicate yourself to achieving it.<sup>[15]</sup>

1. Learn from your lack of success and use it to help you succeed next time. For instance, if you weren't able to run in the community 5k race due to shin splints, make adjustments in your training

and equipment before the next opportunity.

4.



**Reward yourself appropriately each time you achieve a goal.** Reaching a fitness goal is a big deal! You've taken a positive step toward a healthier and happier life, and that should be celebrated. Give yourself a pat on the back and a nice little reward, then get back to work on your next fitness goal!<sup>[16]</sup>

1. Personalize your reward so it suits you. You might go out for ice cream, treat yourself to a movie, or go on a day trip with your family.

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