



DAY 07 - PLAN CHALLENGE

LIVE THE FLOURISHING LIFE: FLOURISHING FITNESS

"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." That's why the final day of the Flourishing Fitness challenge is about planning—so you can take what you've learned this week and use it to succeed in your fitness goals. Research has shown that setting clear goals leads to higher levels of physical activity, performance, self-esteem, stress management and motivation (Travers et al., 2015). Planning has also been strongly associated with improved overall well-being (MacLeod et al., 2008). Having goals provides purpose, structure and meaningful objectives to guide your life. But many of the benefits of planning depend on the kinds of goals you pursue and how you pursue them.

WHAT KINDS OF GOALS TO SET

Are SMART goals smart for you?

You've probably heard about SMART goals, and if you're a goal setter they're likely your go-to. The SMART framework is so well known that we won't go over it here other than to say that it refers to goals which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. But this framework isn't necessarily best for you, as it's less effective for people in the early stages of a pursuit (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2007). For someone who is learning, open goals without specific objectives or outcomes may be more helpful. They are exploratory and encourage you to see how well you can do. They can relieve some of the pressure by allowing you to independently judge your effort and progress (Hawkins et al., 2020). SMART goals require higher levels of commitment and frequent feedback to be most effective—if you are new to something, you might not be so committed to it and you might find performance-based feedback demoralising (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2007). For example, if you want to cut down on sugar, it might be more helpful to start by committing to reduce your portion sizes of high-sugar foods rather than to a specific intake. That being said, if your goal is related to something you already do or know how to do, SMART goals are the most likely to get you there.

Do you want to or do you have to?

The motivation of your goal matters. Those whose goals are driven by 'want-to' make more progress and face fewer temptations and obstacles than those with 'have-to' motivations. In one food-related study, 'want-to'

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motivation was associated with reduced cravings and liking for unhealthy foods (David, 2006). 'Want-to' goals are important, meaningful and interesting to you. 'Have-to' goals are pursued for external reasons (such as approval) or are driven by feelings of shame or obligation to yourself or others. (Park et al., 2017). This doesn't mean your goals shouldn't be challenging or involve steps you might not enjoy at the time, but your core motivation should be personally important to you and its short and long-term consequences should be desirable (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2007). If yours is a 'have-to' goal that needs to be pursued, try focusing on an important outcome or other element which is valuable to you. For example, if you need to lose weight for medical reasons even though weight isn't important to you, you could focus on the improved health you will have or the enjoyment you might find in cooking for yourself instead of getting take-out.

Are you aiming to do or to be?

Both 'do' goals and 'be' goals have specific advantages, and they are best pursued in tandem (Hochli, 2020). 'Do' goals are relatively short-term and are essentially SMART goals—they are concrete and immediately able to be pursued, they have specific steps and outcomes, and progress can be tracked. They feel manageable and focus you on what you need to do day by day. But they are less good at motivating you long-term and can lead you to disengage from your larger goals. They are most effective when well oriented with 'be' goals (Travers et al., 2015). 'Be' goals are broader and more abstract; they're longer-term and open-ended; they're more important and aspirational; they're connected to your sense of self (Hochli, 2020). Their abstractness makes them harder to pursue and less helpful in initiating behaviour. But they make it easier to achieve your 'do' goals by increasing your commitment, clarifying your priorities and helping to maintain change over time. While rewards can motivate you in your short-term goals to some degree, you're far more likely to persevere and maintain changes if they are closely connected to who you are and want to be. At the same time, you are unlikely to make meaningful progress towards your aspirational self if you don't have specific, actionable steps to get you there. If you want to be healthy in your old age so that you can play with your grandkids, for example, that will motivate you to take steps like exercising more, eating a healthier diet and caring for your emotional and cognitive health. Ideally, all your 'do' goals should be related to a larger 'be' goal.

SETTING AND PURSUING GOALS

There are countless methods you could use to set and pursue your goals—here are some evidence-based tips to help.

- **Be selective.** Chances are you can think of a dozen things you'd like to be and hundreds of things you could do to get there. But you can't do everything, and you need to choose your most important goals if you're going to accomplish any. Start with the 'be' goals that are most important and exciting to you, while also

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- taking feasibility into account (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2007).
- **Work backwards.** Once you've identified your main 'be' goals, work backwards to figure out what steps you need to take to get there. Backwards planning produces greater motivation and clarity, less time pressure and higher goal achievement (Park et al., 2017).
- **Plan your approach.** For the steps you can take now, establish what you're going to do when, where and how with as much clarity and detail as you can. Also consider what kinds of temptations, distractions and difficulties you are likely to face, and plan how you will respond. 'Implementation intentions' like these are highly effective in shielding your goals from internal and external disruptions (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2007).
- **Focus on adding, not restricting.** When you're setting goals, focusing on adding things you like rather than restricting can improve your enjoyment of the pursuit and your overall well-being (David, 2006). If you're trying to eat more healthily, your goal could be to eat more of your favourite fruits, vegetables and whole grains rather than taking out your favourite treats. Or if you want to watch less TV, you could aim to spend more time on a hobby rather than setting a strict TV limit.
- **Focus on the 'small areas.'** It's important to monitor your goal-directed behaviours and evaluate your performance, but this can sometimes make you demoralised or complacent. Shifting your focus to the 'small areas' could help you to keep pressing forward towards your goal (Koo & Fishbach, 2012). For example, if you're aiming to jog 50km a week and have done 20km so far, focusing on the 30km you still have to do might be demoralising, but focusing on the 20km you've achieved will sput you on. On the other hand, if you've run 30km already, focusing on what you've already done might make you complacent, whereas focusing on the smaller 20km you have left will encourage you to achieve it.

What fitness goals are you going to set to put into practise what you've learnt this week about sleep, water, aerobics, protein, strength and sugar?

References

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