

Making your health pledge 'SMART'

Make sure that your pledge is personal to you and is about something you really want to do to improve your health. It won't work as well if you're being told what to do by someone else and you don't agree with them. It won't work if you don't understand why you need to make this change. It certainly won't work if your heart's not in it. It must be do-able. You're more likely to stick to your pledge if it's supported by one or more **SMART** targets. Pledges such as *lose weight*, *eat better*, or *reduce stress* are too vague by themselves to help very much. **SMART** targets will help you put more detail into your pledge.

SMART means:

S – Specific (clear, detailed)

M – Measurable (uses numbers)

A – Achievable (realistic, possible)

R – Right for you (important to you, relevant)

T – Timed (includes a time scale)

Examples of helpful and less helpful targets:



Specific: make it clear

Ask yourself "What exactly am I going to do?"

e.g. I'm going to lose weight	✗
e.g. I'm going to lose 6lbs; I'm going to try the 5-2 fast diet	✓
e.g. I'm going to drink less	✗
e.g. I'm going to have three alcohol free days each week	✓



Measurable: where you can, use numbers

Ask yourself "How much, how many, how often?"

e.g. I'm going to take the dog for loads of long walks	✗
e.g. I'm going to walk the dog for half an hour twice a week	✓
e.g. I'm going to more fruit and vegetables	✗
e.g. I'm going to eat five portions of fruit/vegetables at least three days a week	✓



Achievable: make sure that it's possible

Ask yourself "Am I really going to stick to this?"

e.g. I'm going to go for a swim every morning before work	✗
e.g. I'm going to swim for twenty minutes twice a week	✓
e.g. I'm going to stop putting salt on my meals – and eating crisps	✗
e.g. I'm going to replace the salt on my meals with a low salt brand; when I buy a ready meal, I'll choose a low salt version; I'm going to eat no more than 2 bags of crisps a week	✓



Right for you: don't **do something that isn't right for you, or just because someone else thinks it is**

Ask yourself "Do I think it's really worthwhile?"

e.g. I'm going to lose weight because my friends are always going on about dieting	✗
e.g. I'm aiming to lose half a stone because my doctor has told me that losing weight will help me lower my blood pressure – and I'm getting short of breath and uncomfortable when I'm walking up our hill	✓
e.g. I'm going to do a five mile fun run next weekend for a local charity – I hope I'm fit enough because I've never run so far before ...	✗
e.g. I'm going to walk the children to school three days a week so that we all get more exercise – and I'd like to use the car less	✓



Timed: think about your time scale

Ask yourself "How long will I do this for?"

e.g. I'm going to lose weight this year	✗
e.g. I'm aiming to lose an average of 1 pound a fortnight for 20 weeks	✓
e.g. I'm going to go for a 20 minute walk 3 times a week until I'm really fit	✗
e.g. I'm going to go for a 20 minute walk 3 times a week for at least 3 months	✓

So what does this look like in practice?

Let's look at an example of someone who wants to lower their blood pressure

What's my pledge about?

I want to lower my blood pressure

Targets

1. I'm going to change the salt in my cooking for a low salt brand and eat no more than 2 bags of crisps a week – my doctor has told me that eating less salt will help – and I know I do use quite a lot. I'm going to try this for the next six months.

2. I'm aiming to lose 7 lbs over the six months as I know this should help to get my blood pressure down. I'm going to have a go at the 5-2 fast diet* because I understand I'll be able to eat normally for most of the time, so I think I'll find it easier.

3. I'm going to take up swimming again as I've always enjoyed it and I know exercise will help. I'm going to swim for thirty minutes once a week.

After six months, I'll check whether my blood pressure has come down – then decide if I need to carry on with my targets, or make some new ones.



*What's the 5-2 fast diet? See: <http://thefastdiet.co.uk/>

Now for your health pledge ...

What will your targets be?