

Tools for Success

This document outlines the skills you learned throughout the My Best Self course. You can refer to this document any time you need a refresher.

1. Set SMART Goals

SMART goals are goals that are:

Specific

- Be very clear and specific about what you need to do.
- Tip: Think about how you would give step-by-step instructions to someone who did not know anything about the behavior you are trying to change.
- SPECIFIC: "I will walk around the block for 20 minutes 4 out of 7 days each week" vs. "I will get more exercise."

Measurable

- Make sure you pick goals that you can track and measure.
- This is important in order to measure whether you are making progress.
- MEASURABLE: "I will eat 4 servings of green vegetables each day" vs "I will eat more greens."

Attainable

- Pick goals that are behavioral/things that you can do and are within your control.
- Larger goals should be broken down into smaller, achievable steps.
- ATTAINABLE: "I will jog 2 laps around the track" vs "I will run 10 miles every day."

Relevant

- Pick goals that are realistic given your schedule, finances, and overall resources.
- Smaller short-term goals should help you achieve more long-term goals.
- RELEVANT: "I will avoid eating large meals before bed to help improve my sleep" vs "I will play the lottery every day."

Time-bound

- Pick a time-frame to accomplish the goal (e.g., give yourself a deadline, set aside a specific time to accomplish your goal).
- TIME BOUND: "For the next week, I will practice deep breathing techniques for 5-10 minutes before lunch for 3 out of 5 workdays" vs. "I will practice deep breathing techniques at some point."

2. Keep a Food Log

Keeping a food log can help you stick to your diet goals. This is because logging your food helps you stay accountable and makes you more aware of what you are eating. It can also help you plan ahead so you can make sure to eat the foods that are consistent with your goals. Your food log can be in a notebook, on the computer, or on your phone. Choose the format that works best for you. All you need to do is log the following:

1. Log what food you ate.
2. Keep track of the anti-inflammatory foods you are eating
3. Log how much water you drank

3. Make a Commitment

Before starting a change, it can be helpful to make a contract or commitment to another person. Simply stating your goal out loud can be powerful! You can also think about the ways that others can support you in your goals. For example, maybe you would benefit from a workout buddy, or maybe there is someone who can hold you accountable by checking in with you every day. Enlist the help of your support system (family, friends, coworkers, other veterans). Be prepared to explain what you are trying to do and how they can help.

4. Adopt an Experimental Attitude

How you think about change can make a big impact on how successful you can be. Usually, our thoughts drive our behaviors. It can be really powerful to pay attention to what you are telling yourself. It helps to replace negative thoughts with more positive ones. This is actually a skill! You can practice generating thoughts that are positive and motivating. These kinds of thoughts will push you towards positive change.

As you continue to set goals and problem-solve obstacles, it can be helpful to:

1. Think of yourself as conducting an experiment that looks at whether the changes you are making are helpful.
2. Don't jump to conclusions about whether the changes you are making are (or are not) helpful.
3. Give yourself enough time to fully assess the effects of your behavior changes. It can take time to feel the effects of diet and lifestyle changes. It can also take time to figure out solutions to obstacles.

5. Build Habits

To turn a behavior into a habit, it's important to repeat the behavior over and over **in the same context**. For example, try to match your new behavior with something that is already a routine part of your day. Let's say you want to practice diaphragmatic breathing every day. To make this a habit, you should pair the breathing exercise with an event that occurs every day (or almost every day). In this case, you could practice the breathing exercise every day after you brush your teeth or take a shower or before you have a particular meal. Consistently practicing the new behavior (diaphragmatic breathing) with something you already do every day (brushing your teeth) will help you build a habit. Eventually, practicing diaphragmatic breathing every day will feel automatic! The key is **consistency**.

6. Problem-Solve Obstacles

The best way to overcome obstacles is to follow the problem-solving steps, shown below. It can help to write out each of the steps on paper. Or you could talk through the steps with someone else. Following the steps below can help you overcome obstacles that get in your way.

1. Define the problem
2. Identify your goal
3. Brainstorm solutions to solve the problem
4. Evaluate the pros and cons of each solution
5. Pick a solution and develop an action plan
6. Evaluate your success