Setting goals that stick

Last reviewed: October 17, 2026



Good goals have three layers: the result you want, a measurable target that shows progress, and small weekly actions you fully control. Rate your confidence, plan the first step, and track it.

Why it matters: "Get in shape" is a wish, not a plan. Turning it into specific steps is how coaches help people follow through, and you can do it yourself in 15 minutes.

Step 1: Name your why

Write one sentence about why this matters to you. Use your own words.

- "I want to play with my grandkids without getting winded."
- "I want to feel strong and confident in my body."

Step 2: Set three kinds of goals

Type	What it is	Example
Outcome	The result you're after	Lose 15 lb; run a 5K
Performance	A measurable sign of progress	Walk a mile in under 15 minutes; do 10 push-ups
Process	Actions you control each week	Lift 3 times a week; eat vegetables at 2 meals a day

Outcome goals give direction. Process goals are what you actually do, and they deserve most of your attention.

Step 3: Make them specific

For each goal, answer:

- **What exactly?** "Walk 30 minutes" beats "walk more."
- **How often?** "Monday, Wednesday, Friday."
- **When and where?** "Before work, around the neighborhood."
- **By when?** Give outcome and performance goals a date, often 8 to 12 weeks away.

Step 4: Rate your confidence

On a scale of 1 to 10, how sure are you that you'll do your process goals this week?

- **7 or higher:** good to go.
- **Below 7:** make it smaller or easier until you're at 7. Three walks instead of five. Ten minutes instead of thirty.

Hitting a smaller goal builds more confidence than missing a big one.

Step 5: Plan for obstacles

Write down the two things most likely to get in your way, and your plan for each.

- "If it's raining, I'll walk at the mall."
- "If I work late, I'll do a 15-minute home workout instead."

Step 6: Track and review

- **Log every session** in a notebook, an app or **Today's workout** in Plan my workouts.
- **Check in weekly:** did you hit your process goals? What helped or got in the way?
- **Review monthly:** retest your performance goals (see "Test your own fitness") and adjust.
- **Share your goal** with a friend, partner or group if that helps you follow through.

Step 7: Take the first step today

Decide on one small action you'll do in the next 24 hours: lay out your shoes, book a class, buy groceries for tomorrow's lunches.

When things go off track

- **Missed a week?** Restart with your smallest goal. See "Missed a week? Getting back on track."
- **Lost interest?** Change the activity, not the goal. See "When exercise stops being fun."

- **Goal reached?** Celebrate it, then set the next one.

Your goal sheet

	Goal	By when	Confidence (1–10)
Why			
Outcome			
Performance			
Process 1			
Process 2			
First step			

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