MODULE 10

GOAL SETTING AND ADHERENCE

BTNacademy

10.   MODULE 10: GOAL SETTING AND ADHERENCE

10.1.   Module aims

- To fully explain the importance of goal setting for success

- To systematically explain the different forms of goal setting

- To discuss the difference between long-term aims and short-term goals

- To explain the different methods of improving adherence

- To outline the sustainability spectrum

10.2.   Key principles from module 9

In the last module, we discussed the ways in which unconscious habits can alter your behaviour either positively or negatively. This is a salient point as it indicates just how much of what we do, we do without being conscious of it, while also indicating the key role that mindfulness (especially with regard to food) plays in success. If we are not mindful of **why, what, when and how much** we choose to eat, then we are vulnerable to falling prey to both our evolved propensity for gluttony and our automatic, rehearsed, subconscious responses to environmental cues.

Briefly, you learned:

- Habits make up a huge proportion of your daily behaviours

- Habits are wired in to your brain due to neuroplasticity

- Habits are routines, triggered by a cue and done in search of a remembered reward, even after that reward no longer lines up with your values

- Habitual behaviours are especially powerful when you are stressed, tired or distracted

- To alter a habit, first notice the reward and then alter the routine, **or** look to remove the cue

- Your environment can play a key role in the process of altering habits

10.3.   Introduction to goal setting and adherence

So far throughout this course we have mentioned but not fully discussed goals. We've spoken about the theoretical, objective nutritional factors that must be considered when seeking a body composition or performance goal, such as calorie balance, macronutrient intake, micronutrient intake and hydration status, and we have spoken about some of the behavioural factors that can influence your ability to apply those theories to the real world. This conversation begs the questions, however – what is a goal? How, and in fact why do we set them?

This final module seeks to answer these questions. It is our hope that, upon reading the following, you will be empowered to apply all of the principles that you have studied to your own life, or that of those around you in a manner that not only achieves a given end, but that

motivates you to continue towards that end despite the path not always being that of least resistance.

10.4.   Why set goals?

A goal is, very simply, something to aim for. Altering nutritional practices and habits to improve your health, body composition, athletic ability or general wellbeing is not done arbitrarily. Rather, specific alterations are chosen and then implemented because you perceive that there is a disparity between the current situation and the hypothetical future ideal (the same, of course, applies when working with someone else). You change your nutrition because you are here, you want to be somewhere else and you consider nutrition to be the path that connects the two. As such, someone who changes their nutrition already has a goal in mind at some level, it's just not at a very high resolution.

Setting goals gives that fuzzy, blurred ideal some definition. This is important because it is not self-evident which direction you should take when your destination is only defined as 'not here', or 'over there'. Pinpointing a precise end result illuminates the direction in which you need to go, meaning that you are able to then work out how to start moving. Without this precise definition, you are free to take any action you can think of, meaning you often become overwhelmed and frozen into inaction.

As Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat famously stated: **"If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there".**

It goes deeper than just defining terms, however; human beings are creatures that need goals in order to be satisfied. In previous modules, we have noted the importance of the neurotransmitter dopamine for experiencing reward, but also in anticipation of reward.

Recall that the brain has areas that become activated by behaviour closely tied to an individual's values, and recall that dopamine is released in order to create excitement in the pursuit of a valued reward. Not yet mentioned is that this activity is most notably seen in a structure called the nucleus accumbens, which is the same structure associated with the anticipation of a 'fix' for those with addictions. Finally, recall that self-affirmations that closely tie certain alterations in behaviour to values create better outcomes than an attempt to make those same changes without appealing to deeply held beliefs.

Bringing this all together, you should see that a goal set according to someone's values creates excitement during the process. Setting a value-based and well-defined goal creates anticipation mediated by dopaminergic neuronal activity, and therefore entices a greater success rate. To lend more evidence to the argument that goal setting creates anticipation and excitement, therefore increased effort, consider the following – when researched, individuals described as 'go getters' show a significantly higher level of dopaminergic activity than do people who could be described as 'slackers'.

Ultimately, humans need a purpose. Depression rates for unemployed people are significantly higher than for employed people, and the same goes for those on long-term sickness leave. Furthermore, a feeling of purpose has been shown to improve depressive symptoms in retired persons, with those being given plants to look after showing greater perceptions of self-

efficacy and the associated improved state of greater mental health. Experientially, when a person has a specific goal or aim, be that an engaging period of study, an engaging writing task, a job which they love or a task which they find challenging but enjoyable, or even an art project, they will often report losing track of time because they become so focused and engrossed. This engagement with a task is self-evidently an important part of human experience because it allows us to spend hours without having a single negative or anxious thought; and is a sharp contrast to the feelings of boredom and slowly passing time associated with days of inactivity and purposelessness, or with completing a task that one finds unbearably monotonous and unpleasant. To most, an hour spent working on a creative project, completing a task in an engaging computer game or writing something they have set out to write for their own purposes, is a much shorter hour than one spent copying data from one spreadsheet to another, or cleaning the oven.

In short, the first step of setting a goal is aligning a hypothetical future state with your values, and for that you need an **aim**.

10.5.   Setting aims

Your overarching aim is one which is somewhat vague but incredibly meaningful. This is typically something which is a long way off, and which would indicate an enormous level of success for you because it matches your core values and beliefs. Examples of long-term aims could be:

- To retire early, with enough money to travel the world

- To have a happy and close family

- To live in a house that you own, free from debt

- To improve your health in order to see your children and grandchildren grow up

- To meaningfully impact the wider world in a positive manner

- To become famous

- To experience a given event in a given way (to be in a certain shape for your wedding, or to be fit enough to climb Mount Everest, for example)

Your overarching aim could be considered to be a life-goal, and it's probably the aspect of this module which you'll have to think about the least. Not because it doesn't matter so much, but because you will already know at least one or two aims, the acquisition of which would mean you could consider your life to be successful. Of course, the examples given above are somewhat grand aims, but yours need not be. An aim to simply grow a business and be known to your wider social circle or your industry as a successful business owner, or an aim to help your local community in some manner that makes a large difference, or simply to travel the world is just as apt. Whatever you choose, your aim should be something which resonates with you and something which, should you achieve it, would be something you would be proud of in your final moments. To bring this to the topics at hand during this course, a good aim would be to be as healthy and capable as possible, for as long as possible. Of course, what

this phrase actually means will differ by individual, and of course this will not be the core aim for everyone.

The point of the vagueness of these aims will become apparent momentarily, but for now know that we have intentionally not mentioned such goals as to get in shape for a photoshoot, to be in the best shape possible, to lose a certain amount of weight or to achieve a certain level of physical performance. This is not to downplay the value of these successes, rather it is to place them in context and to illustrate that these goals are in fact small parts of larger aims, and without clearly defining your aim it can be hard to keep this in mind.

A goal to be in the best shape possible, for example, could stem from the unconscious, evolved understanding that there are certain characteristics which indicate health and are therefore naturally considered to be more attractive. These include a lower bodyfat level, relatively higher percentage of muscle mass, clear skin, bright eyes etc. A goal to be in the best shape possible, therefore, could be translated into a goal of finding a partner, starting a family, or perhaps using that attractiveness to improve job prospects or social status (whether or not this goal would actually play into that aim is beyond the scope of this course). In short, most superficial things that would perhaps be seen as 'shallow goals' can be explored further.

As per the last module, one of the most effective ways to find your aim is to look instead to your values. Think hard and consider your beliefs. What do you care about more than anything else? Once you have this in mind, it's simply a case of asking yourself how you can manifest that value in a physical form. Taking the example value "health" we can see that the manifestation of that value, therefore the aim, would be to maintain a healthy weight while holding a reasonable amount of lean body mass and displaying great markers of overall wellbeing. This would be your aim.

Once you have your aim, you then need to break it down into steps. Aims are invaluable but they are nonetheless somewhat vague and necessarily far-off, so you need to start thinking of shorter-term actionable steps to take. An Aim can be thought of as a project, and from there you can set goals which are like small actions culminating in the completion of the project. For example, you might set an aim that is 4 or 5 years away (or even longer) but build-up to it using goals that are 8 weeks long or less.

There are four different kinds of goals which you can set, SMART, stretch, outcome and process goals. These are not exclusive and you could (and should) set all four at once, or a selection of them in various combinations. Before we get to that, we will explain them all, starting with SMART goals.

10.6.   SMART goals

A SMART goal is one that is **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant** and **Time-Bound**. The purpose of a SMART goal is to really hone in on one specific aspect of your aim and calculate an achievable manner in which you can complete it. To illustrate this, we will discuss what is perhaps the most pertinent example for many taking this course, or those you will come in to contact with. A common goal that relates to the overall aim of living a long and healthy life is to lose weight, but this goal is incomplete.

The goal "I want to lose weight" is incomplete, making it a poor goal for a number of reasons. Firstly, if you lose 1kg you have succeeded, and if you lose 10kg you have succeeded. If you value one of those more than the other then this tells you your goal is not fully formed.

Next, if you choose to aim for 15kg weight loss but only lose 10kg then you may feel disappointed. That disappointment, tantamount to feelings of failure, can result in higher rates of weight regain than is seen in individuals who are satisfied with their achieved weight. If you have not calculated whether or not 15kg was possible in the first place then you have no real grounds to be disappointed.

Finally, losing 15kg might be a realistic target but the question must be asked – would you be as happy with that loss taking 5 years as you would with it taking 8 months? These factors all matter a lot because, as discussed, precision is critical – without precision you don't know whether you're moving in the right direction, at the rate that you would like. This is the role of the SMART model.

Here is how you would apply it to the above goal:

- **S**pecific: "Losing weight" is incredibly vague which means that attainment is open to interpretation. More than this, losing weight is often a shorthand manner of saying something slightly different (an individual may wish to look leaner, fit certain clothes or improve their health and/or fitness). Many looking to lose weight don't **really** care how much they weigh, they are interested in what their bodyweight means for these other factors. To make that goal more specific you could look to define a certain metric. That **could** be bodyweight meaning you want to lose kilograms, it could be inches lost, clothes sizes dropped or something with more impact, such as blood lipids or the improvement of other disease markers highlighted by a doctor

- **M**easurable: Once you have defined your particular metric, the quantity of that metric needs to be specified. If you were in a race it's not enough for someone to tell you to go as fast as you can until you win – are you supposed to stop at 100m? 800m? 26 miles? For a goal to have meaning you need a finishing line to aim at, so how many kilograms, dress sizes or blood pressure points would signify victory to you?

- **A**ttainable: Let's say your goal is to lose dress sizes, measurable by losing enough dress sizes to fit a size 8 – now, is that achievable? Only you can really determine that, but it's worth keeping in mind the rates of weight loss and gain mentioned in module 1 to help define this

- **R**elevant: Is your goal relevant to your overall aim? This question is simply asking you if your goal actually means something to you, and is a very important one. If your goal here is to reduce your bodyfat percentage to 8% in order to have a full 6 pack but your overall aim is to live a happy, long and healthy life while also maintaining a social circle which revolves around playing a sport, then although dropping to 8% is a more measurable and specific goal than simply losing weight, and it may be achievable, it's not in line with your overall aims and therefore you will not feel the same level of purpose that you otherwise would. Once the difficulty of losing bodyfat increases (as

it will do, as you get leaner) then you will be more and more tempted to give up; without an alignment of goal, aim and values then this becomes almost inevitable. In this example, dropping to 12% bodyfat would play in to the overall aim, meaning the compulsion to continue will be far stronger

- **T**ime-Bound: A goal needs a time constraint because otherwise procrastination and extended breaks from effort don't matter or hold consequence. If something matters to you then you should make it happen as fast as is possible (given what we will say later), and that means it needs a deadline. By definition, taking longer than needed to reach a goal that really matters to you is simply taking too long

What may or may not be obvious is that some of these factors play in to each other. The feasibility of losing 4 dress sizes really does depend on the timeline in which you are operating, and the same goes for losing 15kgs. If your desired level of change is at odds with your timeline given your considerations of how achievable it is, then either your timeline or your goal needs to change. The key thing to remember when doing this is to make sure that your goal still remains relevant to your aim. If your goal becomes too conservative and easy to achieve it will likely lose some of its power. For example, a goal to lose 10kgs in a month may be unreachable, but that doesn't mean that you should drop your target to 1kg in the same timeframe – if a goal is not challenging it quickly becomes boring, to say nothing of the fact that this meagre weight loss is unlikely to alter health outcomes and therefore align with the overall aim.

The reason that it's wise to set a SMART goal is that it sets out a sensible, manageable and well-considered set of steps towards achieving your overall aim in a reasonable amount of time. SMART goals guarantee success so long as diligence and effort are maintained during the pre-defined timeframe, but they are axiomatically non-ambitious. Ambition, however, is no bad thing. Significant and fundamental change can often be done in a short time frame provided large amounts of effort (and an undeniable amount of luck) is applied, which is why it's a good idea to set a stretch goal, too.

10.7.   Stretch goals

Stretch goals are similar to SMART goals but with one difference, you dispense somewhat with the attainable metric. The aim here is not to place a goal on the table which is so far out of your reach that you become demotivated by failure; rather it is there to give you something to strive for (although you are very likely not going to quite manage it). SMART goals leave people with the tendency to be overly conservative, therefore to take longer than needed to achieve an aim, but a stretch goal set alongside a SMART goal allows for over-achievement. Let's use weight loss as an example following the same process but adding to it.

- **Aim:** Maintain a healthy body that makes me feel attractive for the rest of my life

- **SMART goal:** Drop 4 dress sizes by my wedding, meaning I can wear a size 16. This is the least I need in order to meet my aim

- **Stretch goal:** Drop 8 dress sizes by my wedding, meaning I can wear a size 12. This would be amazing

- **Final outcome:** Individual drops 6 dress sizes. They fall short of their stretch goal, but exceed their lower and more reasonable expectations. If they had only set a SMART goal there is a good likelihood that they would have made smaller changes, lost weight slower and ended up only meeting the **minimum** level needed to be happy. Stretch goals led to a better result overall by pushing the potential outcome

10.8.   Short, medium and long-term goals

Most aims set beyond 6 months in the future will involve more than one course of action, and most aims are a long way off, meaning that there could be a significant number of different steps required. The above example is one such case – the lady in question wants to maintain a healthy bodyweight for the rest of her life and feel attractive, and the SMART goal she has set for that is to lose 4 dress sizes by the time her wedding comes around. This is obviously not the end of the road. What this represents is a medium-term goal, a goal that plans out the next 6-12 months of the individual's life and takes her further towards her aim. Once it is completed she needs to set a new challenge. This will be the case for most aims, and planning the whole thing out loosely can help you orient yourself properly.

For many there is no need to formally write out a full A-B process, but having a wider plan in mind can help you to keep things in context and understand where you currently stand. Generally, an aim will be met by a given number of long-term (12 months plus) and medium-term (6-12 months) goals, themselves made up by short-term goals. To illustrate what we mean, let's look at our bride's plans:

- **Aim:** To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, and be proud of how I look

- **Medium-term goal:** To drop 4 dress sizes before my wedding day

- **Short-term goal 1:** I'm going to lose 2 dress sizes in the next 12 weeks. Process goals would be simple, mostly focused on the basics of food. Tracking level A

- **Short-term goal 2:** I'm going to maintain my new weight for 2 weeks while I'm on holiday. Process goals would be based around flexibility and moderation when considering food. Also, probably a process goal involving tracking steps while away

- **Short-term goal 3:** I'm going to lose another 1.5 dress sizes in the next 14 weeks. Process goals largely involve increased exercise and moving to tracking level B

- **Short-term goals 4 and 5:** I'm going to lose the last little bit while taking up crossfit to help improve my shape over the next 16 weeks. Here process goals would perhaps move her to level C tracking and increase her calories, along with joining the local crossfit gym and attending 4 times per week

- **Short-term goal 6:** I'm going to maintain my weight and improve my fitness over the next 8 weeks until the wedding. Here the process would be to increase calories again and improve exercise performance via increasing training frequency

At this point a new long or medium-term goal would be set.

As you can see, there is an incremental increase in the effort required by each process goal in line with the distance that the bride is away from her wedding day. The closer you are to your goal, generally the more effort is required to keep progressing, so breaking down any longer-term aim into shorter term 'bursts' allows you to prepare yourself for this.

It's also wise to allow more time than you believe is needed for each step. If a short-term goal is likely to take 8 weeks, plan for it to take 10, because this allows for unpredictable anomalies or temporary drops in adherence. Without this contingency, it can become necessary to alter everything else you are doing, possibly resulting in a significant setback.

After you have completed this planning process, however, the work is not quite over. Progress is not linear and it would be unusual for the entire process of goal attainment to occur without any issues arising. In order to be successful, you don't only need to plan out how you're going to move towards your endpoint, you need to be aware of how you're going to adjust your approach should you suffer a setback. Without being aware of this it's very likely that the second or third hurdle experienced will represent the end of your efforts, and you need to look at the means by which you can prevent this from happening.

10.9.   Process vs. outcome goals

In the last section we mentioned the term 'process goals' and so before looking at the means by which you can adjust what you are aiming for, we will define process goals and their opposite – the outcome goal. An outcome goal is a goal that focuses upon a numerical or binary 'yes/no', 'true/false' outcome at some point in the future. You may lose 10kgs, add 20kgs to your bench press or reduce your 5k time by 2 minutes, for example. This is very important in the pursuit of an overall aim but it is self-evidently not the full picture because it doesn't answer one very important question – how do you go about putting things in place to do this? After you have set your SMART and stretch outcome goals, you need to set process goals which largely amount to actions you will take to succeed.

Earlier in this course we looked at various things that you can track and one of the things mentioned was habits. Habit tracking is an example of process based goal setting, but to truly make these effective you need to apply SMART principles.

Looking back to the example above of the future bride. The defined goals involve dropping dress sizes, and this involves alterations to her current behaviours around food and activity. She is currently consuming more than or as many calories as she expends, meaning that she isn't the dress size that she wants to be, but that statement isn't fully descriptive.

She doesn't simply eat too many calories because people don't eat calories, they have an overall diet comprised of foods. She likely chooses foods which don't satisfy her hunger or which lead to cravings, she probably fills her home with foods that would encourage snacking, she likely consumes very calorie dense foods that are easy to overeat, she may not know about the importance of calorie balance or the calorie content of her food choices, she may have very low levels of EAT, NEAT or both, and she may not sleep as well as she should.

Eating too many calories is the net result of a number of different actions and behaviours, some done habitually, some done intentionally due to a poor understanding of the

consequences (meaning she doesn't realise that snacking has such an impact) or an insufficient knowledge of the action (meaning, she may choose to eat a cake not knowing how many calories it contains and how much that relates to her calorie needs, or she may drink blended coffees without realising the calorie content). Regardless of the why, the goal of dropping dress sizes represents a lot of behaviours that the bride needs to change. Process goals help an individual to guide themselves through a period of behaviour change in a manner that is relevant to their overall aim. Here's how you would apply this principle to this goal (of course, the information learned in module 9 may need to be applied to this approach, too).

- **Medium-term SMART goal:** Drop 4 dress sizes by my wedding, meaning I can wear a size 16. This is the least I need in order to meet my aim

Once this is planned out, our bride needs to work out SMART process goals which will guide her towards this. Let's look at three common steps taken and apply the SMART model to see if they will match up:

- "I am going to stop drinking alcohol from tomorrow until after the wedding"

It's specific and measurable. Is it attainable? Only the bride can answer that, but her hen do and other pre-wedding social engagements may need to be taken into consideration. Making allowances and applying the principles of flexibility to allow for short, calculated lapses in overall adherence would more than likely allow the bride to make this goal attainable. It may also be relevant to consider whether or not the bride currently drinks enough alcohol to make up a meaningful amount of calories. If the bride is only drinking half a bottle of wine per week this is unlikely to make any kind of noticeable impact on her weight loss, meaning that this should be reconsidered and thought of as a small part of a number of process goals. Of course, this goal is time-bound. Overall this is likely to be an effective process goal.

- "I am going to cut out all starchy carbohydrates from tomorrow until after the wedding"

Again, this is specific, measurable, time-bound and achievable. Is it relevant? As you learned in module 1, the only way that weight loss can be achieved is through a reduction in calorie intake relevant to calorie expenditure. In module 2, however, you learned that carbohydrates are nutritionally non-essential, and that energy can be extracted from fatty acids. This means that, provided the bride doesn't replace her reduced carbohydrates with additional calories from fat and protein, she could succeed (in fact in some, a lower carbohydrate approach to fat loss results in greater adherence and therefore greater fat loss). She mentions only starchy carbohydrates, too, indicating that she will still be consuming vegetables and the micronutrients contained therein.

What must be considered, is that a lower carbohydrate diet will not have a more meaningful effect compared to a lower fat diet or a moderate carbohydrate and moderate fat diet provided calorie balance is equal across all three scenarios. Rather, the benefits (if they can be referred to as such) of a lower carbohydrate diet should be spoken about in terms of adherence, and it is true that these benefits do not manifest in everyone (not to mention that

lower carbohydrate diets negatively impact sporting and exercise performance). As such, the bride should be aware of the full picture and decide for herself whether or not a lower carbohydrate or a more moderate approach better fits her temperament, lifestyle and preferences. With all considered, this may or may not be a good process goal.

- "I am going to take up running until the wedding"

This is a measurable yes/no goal, either the bride starts running or she doesn't. It's also time-bound and potentially achievable. The specificity is lacking, however, meaning that it is difficult to discern whether achievability is in fact present – how often will she run, how far and at what intensity? Currently a short jog around the block once per month would be successful, meaning achievable, but there are very clear issues with this when considering the purpose of the running.

Here we need to assess the relevance of this goal. Considering what we know about the impact of EAT on TDEE, and what we know about the interrelationship between EAT and NEAT it can be difficult to state that taking up running would actually help our bride to reach her goal. Other training modalities may be more beneficial and as such, we can use our critical thinking skills, our knowledge of nutrition and calorie balance and the SMART model to determine that this process goal is not as likely as others to lead to overall success.

You can also use this same principle to set stretch process goals (or SMART process goals can be applied to your stretch goal – whichever way you prefer to apply it). One clear example of applying stretch process goals would be with calorie intake. You may decide that you are going to track calories using level B tracking, and then you may decide that you will aim for a 10% restriction on calories until you reach your goal, but you could also set a stretch process goal of aiming for a 20% calorie deficit. Every day you could then go by hunger, energy, cravings and your social situation to determine which end of the spectrum (or where in the middle) you will aim for that day. If you achieve a larger deficit you will be able to reach your outcome goal faster, but if you do not you will still reach your goal in time. A win win scenario.

As you can see, this process clearly maps out your approach and makes the abstract aim nothing more than the end-product of a concrete set of steps.

To summarise, the process for setting your goals is as follows:

- **Set an aim.** A long-term, overarching outcome that means something to you and aligns with your values. For example, I want to have a body that makes me feel attractive and proud of how I look

- **Set SMART outcome goals** which add up to that aim in a step by step manner. I want to lose 4 dress sizes by my wedding date, then I want to maintain my weight and improve my fitness level

- **Consider setting a stretch goal.** I want to lose 8 dress sizes by the wedding date

- **Set smaller goals** that break these medium and/or long-term goals down into manageable chunks

- **Set SMART process goals and consider setting stretch ones too.** I'm going to eat 1800kcals per day, drink water every time I'm thirsty, go to a class 3 times per week and go to bed by 10pm every night until the wedding date

Within each step, however, some adjustments may need to be made. As mentioned, bumps in the road will appear and what appeared a SMART goal initially may manifest as more of a challenge than originally anticipated. If this happens, goal adjustment becomes a necessity.

10.10. Goal assessment and adjustment

In an ideal world, there would be no need to discuss goal adjustment. You would set your aim, map out an outcome goal and a set of process goals to achieve it, then once it's achieved you'd set a new outcome goal which takes you closer to your aim, and then set process goals to suit, repeating until the aim is achieved. Unfortunately, as we discussed in module 5, it can be wise to track and assess your progress to make sure it lines up with your goals and if not, make adjustments.

These adjustments may be made to your SMART outcome goal – perhaps you reduce the measurable metric to make your target feasible within your timeframe, or perhaps you increase the timeframe instead. If neither of these can be changed then it could be that you need to alter your process goals to speed things up. Maybe you need to do an extra 3000 steps per day or reduce your calorie intake by another 10% because your weight loss has stalled for a few weeks at a time.

Whatever happens, always remember that while your aim is unchanging your goals are only tools, malleable in the search of the ultimate endpoint. Perhaps you are planning a holiday which will impact your ability to meet your goal, fine. All you need to do is adjust something.

If your goal was to lose 8kgs in 10 weeks and at week 4 you find yourself going away for 2 weeks unexpectedly, think around the problem and consider possible solutions. You could:

- Aim to maintain your weight for 2 weeks then extend your timeframe by the same

- Alter your weight loss by ⅕ and aim for maintenance while away

- Do the same, factoring in some weight gain while away if this is not avoidable

- Opt for a more rapid approach in the first 4 weeks, creating a 'buffer' by adopting stretch process goals. If you can lose ⅔ of the target weight in the first 4 weeks and then gain a little while away, you come back with a fighting chance of reaching your ultimate outcome goal. With planning, any event and any setback can be accounted and adjusted for

10.11. Sharp shocks vs. slow and steady

Before we end this module by talking over some simple tactics you can use to improve your adherence to a nutritional protocol, intervention or strategy, we would like to end the section on goal setting by introducing a concept which we'll refer to as the time/severity spectrum.

Fig. 93

Time available to achieve goal

Severity of measures taken
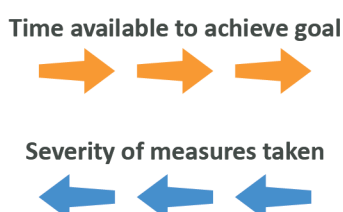
This very simple graphic tells you two things, one of which is more obvious than the other. First, it tells you that the shorter the timeframe is on your outcome based goal, the less likely it is that you will be able to attain it and therefore your approach (your process goals) must be more severe. If, for example, you wish to lose towards 1.5% of your bodyweight per week, you are going to need to use a far greater calorie deficit than someone losing 0.5%, and you'll have to accept all of the consequences of doing so.

Conversely, this also tells you that you are able to use a more severe, rapid approach if you would like to so long as you don't do it for very long. A rapid initial fat loss approach can improve long-term adherence and success compared to a slow and steady approach, so you could perhaps look to lose 1.5% of your bodyweight for 4 weeks followed by 0.5-1% for 4-6 weeks, and then repeat. There is no right and wrong way to set goals, so long as you make sure your approach is **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant and **Ti**me-Bound without going too far outside of the limitations on weight change laid out in module 1.

10.12. Improving adherence

So far, we have discussed aims, goals and processes but haven't actually touched on the most difficult part of setting goals – following through with it all. Provided your aims, goals, mini goals and process goals are all aligned with your values this should be somewhat easy to do, but this is not always the case. As such, to round off this module and the course itself, we will outline some strategies for improving your adherence and therefore your results.

10.12.1.   Accountability

The first tip we can offer is to create accountability. Staying on track with a goal can be difficult even if it **is** a SMART one, and so it can be important to have peers helping you along. Peer supported lifestyle interventions are shown to be more successful than interventions undertaken alone, and so confiding in a friend, loved one or paid coach can be a valuable asset. If none of these are possible, social media peer groups can be an effective tool (though not as effective as face-to-face support). Not only will this keep you accountable, it can allow for an objective view of your progress. This means that you won't adjust your approach unnecessarily, and you don't carry on doing something that isn't working.

10.12.2.   Know yourself

When writing your goals, it's imperative that you understand yourself. That means understanding what your aims are and the reason they matter to you before writing SMART goals, and knowing your mentality towards the trade-off between easy change and quick change as per the time/severity spectrum. A slow and steady approach makes it easy for some and boring for others, and knowing where you stand can be very powerful.

Not only that, you need to know your schedule, your dieting history and preferred approaches and everything else that might be relevant. Do you prefer a certain macronutrient ratio (that provides all you need)? Do you prefer a certain eating schedule, or a given exercise modality? You cannot force yourself to do things like a self-controlling tyrant, all you can do is coerce yourself towards more positive behaviours with which you identify and agree.

Know who you are and what you can do, rather than setting yourself up to fail.

10.12.3.   Fix your environment

Eating well starts in the supermarket, because your diet 'lives' in the kitchen. Be sure to surround yourself with the foods that will promote health and success in your goals, while minimising the influence of those foods around which you struggle to control yourself. Be flexible and allow yourself the pleasures that food can offer, but always keep that in context.

10.12.4.   Create small wins

Small wins are very short-term, easy-to-achieve goals designed to build-up momentum. Perhaps you start each morning by making your bed, or you clean your kitchen after each meal, making it pleasant to cook in. Neither of these things will improve your body composition directly, but they will give you a greater sense of self-efficacy and control which is associated with greater successes in health interventions. Believing in yourself is important, and succeeding with small goals is one way to manage that.

10.12.5.   Manage your habits

Notice your habits because these can sabotage your adherence without you realising. Recognise your routines and hone in on your cues. By altering these and making positive actions habitual, success becomes habitual too.

10.12.6.   Take a phasic approach

In line with what we mentioned earlier, setting one SMART goal for the entire time that you are chasing an aim is unlikely to be an effective strategy. There are exceptions, of course, but if your aim is over 6 months away you're probably going to benefit from doing it in stages, perhaps taking breaks or short-term diversions to keep yourself interested and raring to go. A successful 18 month approach with 6 months of breaks is far more useful than an unsuccessful, break-free 12 month one.

10.12.7.   Your aim must matter

This largely speaks for itself. Your aim needs to be something that matters, it must be something you truly value. It's an unquestionable fact that any goal or aim that has no intrinsic

value to you will be very difficult to chase once it becomes difficult to do so, meaning that identifying your values and aligning your aims and goals with them can make the difference between an exercise in restriction and tedium, and an engaging process of self-improvement.

10.12.8.   Keep it simple

And finally, the best way to adhere to something is to make it easy to adhere to, and the tracking levels we've laid out are a perfect example of this. You get around 80% of the benefit from something thanks to 20% of the work that you do, so don't be afraid to cut off some excess complications in order to improve your day-to-day adherence. If you can reach your ideal calorie balance with 3 gym sessions and 4 days of walking, then don't do more than that. If you can reach your goal on 1800 calories and properly planned meals made up of whole foods then don't download an app and measure protein. Your approach should be as complex as it needs to be and no more.

10.13. Applying this to others

Of course, those interested in nutrition will not only undertake study to help themselves for it is likely that you, our student, will look to apply this knowledge to friends, family or clients. We applaud you for, and encourage you in doing this. Communicating effective and evidence based nutritional theory and practice to someone is one of the most powerful methods you can utilise to help that person improve their health. If you are looking to do so as a coach, we would strongly advise you to join the BTN Practical Academy for a more in-depth look at coaching and coaching practice, but for now we would ask you to consider the following:

10.13.1.   ALWAYS look for strong evidence based materials

This course is a great example, but we would also recommend you look to textbooks and governing bodies such as the UK Food Standards Agency, NHS Choices, The SACN and the ISSN. The guidelines provided by these bodies are generated using the entirety of the current evidence meaning that you are not liable to falling victim to cherry-picking or misinterpreting research. Looking at primary research, you run the risk of finding one or two studies to back a claim, while being totally unaware of a host of information that indicates the opposite. Evidence based nutrition practice isn't about being able to back your statement with a research paper, it is about promoting the general consensus from a whole body of information, and it is the job of these governing bodies to do the hard work for you.

10.13.2.   Communicate healthy eating guidelines appropriately

Social media, one to one discussions and even public speaking opportunities are great methods that you can use, so long as you provide education and information rather than prescriptive instruction. For example, it would be excellent to relay evidence based information around dietary protein, but inadvisable to simply tell someone how much protein to eat without offering your reasoning, and allowing the person to make their own mind up, having heard pros and cons.

10.13.3.   Be aware of the limits of your knowledge and expertise

Clinical nutrition which deals with those who fall outside of the WHO categorisation of 'healthy' discussed in modules 1 and 3 may have very different needs – similarly those with eating disorders (which are not limited to people who are underweight) will more than likely need a multidisciplinary approach involving a number of professionals. 'First, do no harm' is an excellent mantra to bear in mind, while another is simply 'when in doubt, refer out'. Referral will generally be to a GP, as a first port of call, but a fully qualified dietician or clinical, registered nutritionist may be another worthwhile option. This could be either to hand them over to someone else, or to gain supervision for an intervention you can both work together to implement with an individual.

It is not your role to deal with people who have medically relevant issues, nor is it within your authority to prescribe treatments, so leave that to those who are qualified to do so. Your practice should be inclusive and delivered equally to anyone looking for help, but that must come alongside an appreciation for your limits of practice.

10.13.4.   Continually update and increase your knowledge

We mention the BTN Practical Academy above, but there are a host of other courses available along with almost innumerable textbooks and resources that can help you progress with your ability. This will help you maintain your competence and expand your ability to help others, which should be your primary objective.

10.13.5.   You don't work with 'clients', you work with individuals

Each individual has a right for you to respect their dignity, for you to remain honest, open and reliable and for you to respect their views. You should act ethically at all times – not only because it's a legal requirement but because ethical and respectable practitioners are able to more readily instigate change in the individuals with whom they work.

10.14. Final thoughts

Throughout this course, it is our hope that you have come to understand food from every angle. You should now understand it from a high level of magnification – what it's made of, how your body comes to use it, and what happens when we eat more or less of it. You should know a rough means by which you can assess your requirements, and some methods of planning and tracking that. You should know the importance of sleep, of being mindful, and of some choice supplements. And now after module 10 you should also have an appreciation for goal setting and the way that the goals you set play in to your, or someone else's ability to succeed.

Think about the processes this manual has taken you through and look to implement these theories in yourself and with others. Remember, nutrition knowledge is power and it has life changing potential. For now we end our journey together, but we hope to see you soon on the BTN Practical Academy.

Tom Bainbridge and Ben Coomber

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