

Where am I heading?



Lots of things will have changed since you have had chronic pain. You may well have stopped doing things that you previously enjoyed. Sometimes people tell us that they don't feel like the same person anymore. This is because the things we do express something about who we are and what is important to us. So when we can't do those things, it can feel like we can't be ourselves.

For some people, being in pain makes them focus on what is really important, but for others it feels like the really important stuff gets lost in the middle of just trying to cope with life. If we are spending all our energy fighting against chronic pain, we can't move towards what is important to us.

It is really common to think back to what you used to do and feel that it is all out of reach now. That can leave us feeling sad, frustrated and generally fed up! It can even make us lose motivation to try anything at all because it's not the same as what we did in the past.

Moving towards what we value, what is important to us, is still hugely important when you have a chronic health condition – perhaps more so. Moving towards our values helps us to feel less restricted by our health condition and to enjoy our lives more.

What are my values?



Values are not the same as goals. Goals are things we want to achieve, and we know when we've achieved them eg. losing weight, getting a new job, going on holiday. A goal is a sign that we are on the right path – but a value is the direction in which we are travelling. Values are like a compass that guides our direction; goals are more like landmarks that we reach along the way.

We all have values – things that are important to us, things that we really care about. These are what guide our choices in life and motivate us as we move through life. Every one of us is different and our values will also be different. Values often change over time. For example, what is important to us at 18 years old may not be the same as at 45.

When we can't act according to our values we can feel frustrated. Sometimes we don't realise how much we value something until we are unable to act on that value. For example, if you value being the financial provider for your family but you are unable to work because of poor health, or you value being independent but then need to rely on others because you can't do things for yourself.

Are goals important?

Someone once said, "If you aim at nothing, you are sure to get there"! The good thing about goals is that they can help us move forward towards the things we value. They can also help us see the progress we are making. Living with pain and fatigue makes everything really hard. It can be difficult to get motivated to do things – even the things that we normally enjoy doing. Setting goals can help us move forward and feel like we are making progress.



We should choose goals that help us move towards our values.

Examples of values and goals:



Value: being a mother and caring for my children.



Goal: To walk my children to school twice a week.



Value: being respected for my skills



Goal: To work in a job where I can use my skills



Value: having friendships/ being a friend



Goal: To go out with my friends once a week.

How do I set a goal?

Once we know what direction we want to move in (our values) we can then choose goals to help us along the way. Any goal we set should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Rewarding and Time limited (SMART).

Example of some goals:

- 🎯 To be able to walk to the local shop and back (150m), in 2 months' time.
- 🎯 To be able to sit for 2 hours so that I can go on holiday in an aeroplane in July.
- 🎯 To do voluntary work for 3 hours per week by Christmas.

Goals may need to be further broken down into smaller goals which will be the steps you take towards the bigger goal.

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In the first example above:

- 🎯 To be able to walk to the local shop and back (150m), in 2 months' time.

Smaller goals:

- 🎯 To be able to walk to the end of my road and back (50m), in 3 weeks' time
- 🎯 To walk to the post box and back (100m) in 6 weeks' time

EXAMPLE

One of Robert's values is being a dad. It is really important to him that he is involved with his children and able to have fun with them. Previously he would play games in the park and run around with them. He can't do that now. He has thought about what other things he could do that would enable him to still fulfil that value. He wants to be able to walk with his children to the park and push his daughter on the swing. He sets a goal:



To be able to push my daughter on the swing in the park for 5 minutes, in 6 weeks' time.

EXAMPLE

Mary really values learning new things. It is important to her that she can study and increase her knowledge. She also loves helping people and values being able to support people who are going through difficult times. She wants to learn about counselling as she would love to work as a counsellor in the future. She sets a goal:



To complete an "Introduction to Counselling" online course, by Christmas.

Once you have a goal, you can use the principles you have learnt in the previous section on managing activity, to plan how you will work towards it.

EXAMPLE

Robert makes a plan to go to the park with his daughter 3 times a week and to gradually increase the amount of time he can push her. To start with he can only push her for 2 minutes before the pain gets worse.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
2 mins	2.5 mins	3 mins	3.5 mins	4 mins	5 mins

EXAMPLE

Mary thinks about what she needs to be able to do, to cope with the course. She identifies that she struggles to sit for more than 20 minutes and she struggles to concentrate for more than 15 minutes. In order to do her studies, she would like to work for an hour at a time, with mini breaks to change her posture. She makes a plan to gradually increase her sitting tolerance and to gradually increase her concentration. She also thinks about her study area and makes sure she has an adjustable chair and her desk is the right height.

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Over to You

Now think about setting some goals based on your values and the things you are struggling with. It is also useful to think about the things that might get in the way so you can begin to plan how to overcome those things. Think about what you can do to start moving towards your goal. An example has been given to help you.

What I value	What I want to do	When I will achieve it	What might stop me	What I can do
<i>I value my friendships and being a good friend</i>	<i>Meet up with my friends for coffee once a week</i>	<i>2 months' time</i>	<i>Being too tired and in too much pain. I might not cope.</i>	<i>Start by going out once, just for half an hour. Go somewhere close by. Let my friends know what I'm trying to do so they can support me.</i>