

Rewards as motivators



Children aren't the only ones who respond to rewards when attempting to achieve their goals — adults do too. But for some reason, adults hesitate to give themselves rewards. Using rewards as motivators is one of the most effective, but least used, tools in pursuing and achieving goals. Rewards can be provided by others. For example, many employers provide recognition and rewards for healthy behaviors. You can also give yourself rewards.

Rewards may be tangible and intangible

Tangible rewards have the advantage of reminding you of what you accomplished. Every time you see your reward, you are reminded of your accomplishment. Rewards don't have to be related to your goal in order for them to be a positive reminder. But, be sure your rewards don't negatively interfere with your goals. Some people like to put aside a small amount of money as they accomplish each critical task. They use the money to buy or do something they would enjoy when they reach a pre-set milestone. Some ideas for tangible rewards include the following:

- Books, music, movies, apps
- Plays, concerts or sporting events
- Perfume or cologne, bath soaps or oils
- Flowers or plants
- Pedicure, manicure, facial or massage
- Cooking lessons, art lessons, dance lessons or a yoga class
- Hobby or craft supplies
- Contribution to a charity

Rewards don't have to be tangible or cost money

Some examples of intangible rewards include the following:

- Marking off small goals on a list of daily or weekly tasks
- Practicing positive affirmations (see the next page — Congratulate yourself)
- Asking someone to give you positive feedback on a regular basis
- Giving yourself the gift of time — For example, put aside 10 minutes for each day that you work toward your goal. When you accumulate a significant block of time, spend it doing something just for you, such as browsing at a museum, building something in your workshop or working on a community project.

The questions on the following page may help determine rewards that will work for you.

Activity: How will you reward yourself?

Ask yourself:	Possible rewards
What would be a nice gift to receive from a friend?	
If you had some extra money, how would you spend it on yourself?	
What do you like to do for fun?	
What makes you feel really good?	
What are your hobbies or major interests?	

Congratulate yourself for progress

When you've taken a small step toward your goal, stop and give yourself a private word of congratulations. Say: "It feels good to be in control" or simply "Way to go." These pats on the back that you give yourself are another way to encourage positive behaviors. Using positive statements or affirmations as rewards also has the benefit of building confidence in yourself.² In addition to congratulating yourself, listen for and learn to accept compliments from others around you who are supportive of your efforts and eager to provide positive feedback.

The opposite of rewards is punishment — which should be avoided. Punishment tends to suppress undesired behavior only temporarily. It also decreases self-esteem and increases emotional stress — both of which are barriers to progress.² In fact, if you are failing to reward yourself for your progress, you are essentially punishing yourself. Don't deprive yourself of well-deserved rewards with every step along the way.

**Encouragement:**

As you progress toward your goal, the best reward may be the internal satisfaction you feel from pursuing and attaining the goal itself.

Sources:

1. INTERVENT International. Lifestyle management program: Setting goals, 2020.
2. Prochaska, JO and Norcross, JC. Systems of Psychotherapy: A *Transtheoretical Analysis* – Ninth Edition. New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.

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