



The Faculty of Sport and
Exercise Medicine (UK)

EXERCISE PRESCRIPTION IN HEALTH AND DISEASE:

**A SERIES OF CASES FOR
MEDICAL STUDENTS.**

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SOLUTION FOCUSED MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

It is now recognised that every appointment should include health promotion. This requires all practitioners to have the skills and confidence to take the initiative and actively facilitate health-related behaviour change. This chapter aims to highlight patient-centred ways to promote physical activity in the full context of a person's wider determinants of health and wellbeing.

Focus on Solutions

Simply giving advice is not sufficient. Learning to lead Solution Focused conversations enables patients to create their own personalised solutions.

Figure 1: Example of a Solution Focused Motivational Strategy

Agree Best Hopes →	Explore Preferred Futures →	Discover What Is Working →	Highlight Progress
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Agree Best Hopes

Asking about 'best hopes' allows patients to show professionals that they are well intentioned and desiring to create a healthier future. Benefits include maximising patients' cooperation and satisfaction. Solution Focused questions require professionals to trust patients as experts in their own lives.

Practice example – Part 1

- *What are your best hopes from coming to see me?*
- I just can't continue with how things are going, my weight is really starting to bother me... I just don't know what to do.
- *And what are you hoping for from deciding to come and talk to me?*
- I thought maybe you could give me some ideas for losing weight... but I've tried everything.

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• *And what are you hoping these ideas will lead to?*

- Well I want to get back on-track; I want to get back to being myself.

• *Okay, let me check...from our talking today your best hopes are to get back on-track and back to being yourself, is that right?*

- Yes.

Taking a moment in every consultation to enquire about patients' 'best hopes', turns passive recipients into active participants in "self care".

- Practice tip

Asking this question as soon as possible, allows each consultation to serve their aims. Do not worry if the patient is not yet talking about 'taking more physical activity or exercise' or about any of the other agendas we as professionals have (e.g. smoking, medication-adherence etc).

Explore Preferred Futures

Once a patients' best hopes have been set, practitioners gain as detailed a description of what these best hopes will look like when they are realised as possible. Investigating preferred futures enables patients to determine their own realistic and unique preferences for achieving them.

- Practice tip

Key to increasing physical activity is eliciting patients' local knowledge for ideas and solutions that fit their lives.

Stay with the positive

The process of being asked about the preferred future in a gentle step-by-step way, invites the patient to think in new ways. A rich, empowering and hopeful vision of what life could be like is created.

- Practice tip

Ask patients how they will 'notice' when they are achieving their best hopes in the future.

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Focus on signs

Guiding the patient to imagine and describe the very first signs of progress makes it easier for patients to understand what they need to do and experience early improvement. For example, 'being healthy' may be a far away goal, but choosing to 'take the stairs' is possible in the very near future.

Practice example – Part 2

• *Let's imagine that you wake up tomorrow morning and you are back to being yourself and on-track...what is the very first thing that you will notice?*

- I'd walk the kids to school, rather than taking them in the car.

• *And how will walking the kids to school be good for you?*

- It would put me in a better mood and set me up for the day.

• *Great. What would this better mood lead to?*

- I'd probably be bothered to look for work. I was made redundant last year.

• *And what else would tell you that you are being yourself and on track?*

- I'd want to do more with my family...for example, I'd suggest we started back at swimming. I'd also like to get back in touch with friends.

• *Where do you swim?*

- At the local school.

• *When would be a good time to go?*

- Practice tip

Patients want the same positive outcomes as professionals. They simply have their own unique ways of expressing their best hopes and preferred ways and order of achieving them.

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Discover what is working

Solution Focused questions can be used to illuminate what patients are already doing well (aspects of the preferred future already being achieved). This moves professionals away from thinking they have to initiate change, rather the task is to find positive health-related behaviour and encourage the patient to do more of it.

Ask scaling questions

0 to 10 scales help to make best hopes and preferred futures more concrete and give momentum to patients' efforts. Scales demonstrate that patients are (even before their first appointment) already on their way to achieving their desired healthier lifestyle.

Practice example – Part 3

• *On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 representing the worst things could ever be and 10 representing you being fully yourself and on-track; where would you say you were at the moment?*

- I'd say a 2 because I really have been struggling.

• *Why 2 and not lower....what are you doing....even a little, that you are pleased with?*

- I have been forcing myself to take the kids to the park... but it doesn't happen very often.

• *And what's better when you force yourself?*

- It gets me out of the house and it means I have to be active! The kids like me to get involved. It also shows me that I can still do things.

• *What else do you know is good to force yourself to do?*

- The exercises my physio gave me for my back! It's so easy to skip them but for the last few weeks I've been doing them everyday. I've even made myself a chart.

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• *What is better when you do your exercises?*

Past and recent successes

Uncovering times of competence, recent improvements and coping helps patients to utilise and adapt their strengths to current priorities.

As well as capturing what patients are already doing well, scales can be utilised for eliciting further signs of the preferred future beginning to happen.

Practice example – Part 4

• *How will you know when you have moved up to 3?*

– I will have asked Dave at work if he wants to start-up our bike rides again.

• *What else?*

– I would be walking the kids to school at least twice a week.

• *What else?*

– I would be looking for work on the internet and maybe phoning a few old work colleagues for advice.

If a patient does not naturally talk about becoming more physically active (or other health behaviour you deem important), it may be appropriate to introduce this into the conversation, whilst still maintaining a Solution Focused approach. For example:

- As you probably know, it is now part of my job to encourage all my patients to lead a healthier lifestyle....can you tell me 5 things you have been doing recently to look after your health?
- Being physically active is important for all of us...how are you taking care to be physically active?
- When have you been physically active in the past?

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- How is being physically active good for you?

- Practice tip

When learning this approach, many practitioners are surprised that patients are not given an 'action plan'. Rather, this way of working simply leaves the patient knowing a range of achievable options for improving their health. The professional is required to have confidence that the patient will choose to make improvements to their lifestyle, in a way and at a time that is right for them.

Highlight progress

Purposefully utilise future appointments to ask about progress. Asking 'What is better?' invites patients to review what improvements they have made and communicates practitioners' high expectations. The benefit of not setting a formal goal(s) in the previous appointment is that the patient can now take all the credit for their success.

- Practice tip

Fully explore what is better, allowing the patient to enjoy and reflect on their improvements and knock-on benefits. Ask about the good intentions behind patients' efforts to improve their lifestyles.

Even if patients initially report that nothing is better, the professional is gently persistent in looking for small signs of progress.

Practice example - Part 5

Follow-up appointment:

- *What has got better since last time we met?*

- Err...I'm not sure if anything has... a lot has been going on.

- *I know it's difficult to think back... I'm interested in what you have been pleased to notice?*

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- Well my mood is better and I've definitely got more energy these days.

• *How have you noticed?*

- I'm wanting to do more things, for example, yesterday we all went swimming.

• *What made you think of doing that?*

- Well you know I want to get back on-track.... I'm trying to do more.

• *What difference is swimming making?*

- We have something to look forward to now as a family... we go on a Wednesday.

• *Great....how else are you noticing you are being more yourself and on-track?*

- Now you ask.... I've been sleeping better and I've even got an interview scheduled for next week.

• *That's great. I'm also pleased to tell you that your blood pressure has improved. What do you think most explains this; your increased exercise, your better mood, sleeping better or something else?*

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References and Further Reading

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