Regular exercise

Only a few lifestyle choices have as large an impact on your health as physical activity. But many face a problem of keeping up regular exercise. What are some of the tricks?

At first, you can keep it short and sharp. My personal trainer, Robert, says a workout doesn't have to take an hour: "A well-structured 15-minute workout can be really effective if you really are pressed for time." As for regular, longer sessions, he says: "You tell yourself you're going to make time and change your schedule accordingly."

My rule is: if it doesn't work, change it. For example, it rains for a week, you don't go running once and then you feel guilty. It's a combination of emotion and lack of confidence that brings us to the point where, if people fail a few times, they think it's a failure of the entire project. Remember it's possible to get back on track.

If previous exercise regimes haven't worked, don't beat yourself up or try them again — just try something else. We tend to be in the mindset that if you can't lose weight, you blame it on yourself. However, if you could change that to: "This method doesn't work for me, let's try something different," there is a chance it will be better for you and it prevents you having to blame yourself, which is not helpful.

"We start to lose muscle mass over the age of around 30," says Hollie Grant, a personal-training instructor. Resistance training (which is using body weight, such as press-ups, or equipment, such as resistance bands) is important, she says: "It is going to help keep muscle mass or at least slow down the loss. There needs to be some form of aerobic exercise, too, and we would also recommend people start adding balance challenges because our balance is affected as we get older."

My second rule is **raising the ante**. If you do 5-km runs and you don't know if you should push faster or go further, rate your exertion from one to 10. As you see those numbers go down, that's when you should start pushing yourself a bit faster. Robert says that, with regular exercise, you should be seeing progress over a two-week period and pushing yourself if you feel it is getting easier. You're looking for a change in your speed, endurance, or strength.

Another shortcut to regular exercise is to work out from home. If you have caring responsibilities, you can do a lot within a small area at home. In a living room, it is easy to do a routine where you might alternate between doing a leg exercise and an arm exercise. "It's called Peripheral Heart Action training and involves doing six or eight exercises for upper and lower body. This effect of going between the upper and lower body produces a pretty strong metabolism lift and cardiovascular workout," Robert says. Try squats, half press-ups, lunges, dips and raises. You're raising your heart rate, working your muscles, and having a good general workout. These take no more than 15−20 minutes and only require a chair for some exercises.

And what about doing chores? We are often told that housework and gardening can contribute to our weekly exercise targets, but is it that simple? "The measure really is you're getting generally hot, out of breath, and you're working at a level where, if you have a conversation with somebody while you're doing it, you're puffing a bit," says Robert. With gardening, you'd have to be doing the heavier gardening — digging — and not just weeding. If you're walking the dog, you can make it into a genuine exercise session — run with the dog, or find a route that includes some hills.

So, I think everyone can do exercise regularly and experience the health benefits of physical activity — age, abilities, ethnicity, shape, or size do not matter.

According to the author, doing exercise at home is...

1) possible with a good personal trainer.
2) convenient for busy people.
3) hardly enough on a regular basis.
4) more comfortable than at a gym.