**Don’t Sweat It: Take the “Work” out of Working Out**

January is upon us once again, the month where we make (and break) our New Year’s resolutions.

No matter how sincere our intentions to improve body and mind, what seems doable (and exciting!) on January 1st, often feels like a chore by mid-February.

So this year, rather than grand ambitions to exercise with gusto and get in shape — let’s aim for slow, steady, *measurable* progress. Tell perfection to scram! This is all about gentle, compassionate exercise. Less work, more fun.

What might this look like, you ask?

1. Making small physical efforts, on a regular basis
2. Creating exercise goals that suit your body and lifestyle.
3. Tracking your progress using *measurable* targets and indicators
4. Finding an accountability partner.
5. Giving yourselves heaps of praise for every exercise attempt. (Lifting a book or coffee cup counts!)
6. Staying aware of the feel-good effects

Fun fact: This idea of using goals, targets, and performance indicators stems from decades of work in economics, social sciences, environmental studies, and public policy. If it worked in all these fields, imagine what it can do for you! More on this later.

**Benefits of Exercise Over 80**

As this is an article on exercise, we’d be remiss not to mention at least a few benefits (well, more than a few):

* Move with ease, or a bit easier
* Boost brainpower
* Improve balance, wobble less
* Help your organs do their job
* Enhance mood (hello, serotonin!)
* Lift things (groceries, possessions, crafts, books)
* Improve sleep
* Head out and about — even if it’s slowly with a walker or in a wheelchair — to enjoy our glorious neighborhood.

**Small Efforts Add Up to Exercise**

Exercise doesn’t have to be intense to be effective. It’s about how each small effort — if done on a somewhat regular basis — tallies up to a fitness routine. Case in point. Theo’s kindly shared his daily exercises:

1. On waking: leg lifts in bed (how many and reps?)
2. TBA
3. TBA
4. TBA
5. TBA

Clearly, he’s considered his physical strengths and limitations, and what times of day work best for him. In the afternoon, he prefers doom scrolling on his phone to any form of exercise, and that’s a-okay! If there are times of day exercise doesn’t feel right, don’t force it. Work with your natural rhythms.

**Gentle Exercise Suggestions**

**Arms**

1. Once an hour or every few:

* Lift your arms above your head for 5 to 10 seconds, next:
* Hold them out at the level of your shoulders (or however high you can) for 5 to 10 seconds
* Pull your arms back gently to open your chest.

For those with balance issues, try this with one arm against the wall.

1. If you’re able to, cross your arms in front of your chest (elbows out) and hold them for as long as you can. Rest, then try again.

**Legs**

1. For those who can, get up from your chair and sit down again 3 times, 3 times a day. Use arm rests if needed.
2. In bed or sitting, flex your toes towards your shin, then point them down. Repeat.
3. Lift your lower leg while sitting. 5 to 10 times, each leg, a few times a day.
4. Timed walking. For those who are steady on their feet or with a walker. This is not actually about speed or covering distance. It’s about creating a habit of walking for a certain amount of time each day *or* 3 to 5 days a week. If you miss a day, no big deal. Try again tomorrow.

**Create Your Goal & Track Your Progress**

**Your exercise goal is the big picture**, the overall thing you're aiming for. It’s usually broader and focuses on the outcome you want. Think of it as your destination.

*Example: “I want to be healthier this year.”*

**Your target is a specific milestone** or result you want to hit on the way to reaching your goal. It’s more concrete and gives you something to measure progress by. Think of it like a waypoint or a checkpoint on the way to your destination.

Example: “I want to exercise for at least 10 minutes, 3 to 5 times a week for the next month.”

**Your performance indicator is a way to measure how well you're doing** toward reaching your target. It’s usually a number that tells you if you’re on track. Think of it as your scoreboard, showing you if you’re achieving or need to adjust your efforts.

*Example: “I track how many minutes I spend exercising each day in my exercise journal.”*

**Find An Accountability Partner**

Some of us are self-starters who are great at sustaining momentum. Others (like me!) need support and a friendly nudge to stay on track. Have a friend at Heritage who could be your accountability partner, or you theirs? Help each other through those “I want to give up!” moments.

## **Listen to Your Body (and other helpful reminders)**

* **Go Slow**: Start with a few minutes and gradually build up. Baby steps are still steps.
* **Your Body Knows:** Never go past the point of gentle tension or light exertion. If something doesn’t feel right, don’t push it. It’s important to feel comfortable and safe.
* **Use Support**: Use a cane, walker, a chair, or the wall for balance when needed. You’ve got this!
* **Hydrate**: Drink a ½ glass of water before you exercise and more after. Low-or-no sugar drinks with electrolytes are helpful too.
* **Stay Consistent**: It’s amazing how quickly the body acclimates to (and enjoys!) a daily exercise routine. Even if it’s just 5 or 10 minutes a day.