

Fitness tips from a beautiful TV show starlet

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Sci-fi starlet **Julia Benson** has a perfect workout partner. Almost.

He's always ready to exercise and he never complains during particularly grueling training sessions.

But he only does cardio.

He is, of course, a 3½-year-old chocolate lab.

"He definitely keeps me active," the Winnipeg-born actress says in a phone interview from her Vancouver home.

"We run a lot, which is what I love doing the most for exercise. We'll go down and run at the beach (Spanish Banks). Or we'll do some hikes. There's tons of amazing trails around here."

Her cardio partner's name is Bauer.

As in the company that makes hockey gear?

"Yeah ... or Jack Bauer from 24," she laughs.

Most days, their outdoor treks last about 45 minutes.

Benson, aka Lt. Vanessa James on science fiction TV show *Stargate Universe*, also likes to go inline skating in the summer "when it's not raining in Vancouver."

But Bauer doesn't tag along.

"He's not quite that trained," she chuckles.

Like most savvy fitness enthusiasts, the married 31-year-old brunette knows that variety is the spice of a good workout regimen.

"I like to switch things up," she notes.

That includes power yoga – a more vigorous form of yoga – twice weekly for 60-90 minutes each session, along with 25 minutes of weight training two times a week.

"I love lifting weights," says Benson, also known by her maiden name Julia Anderson.

"I'll work out with trainers. I've had a couple different trainers at different points in my life and I'll just do it for a few months. That way you learn different exercises and you can see what your body responds to and I'll take those exercises with me in my regime."

Pumping iron has helped the five-foot-seven Benson maintain a toned body weight of 126 pounds.

"I find my body responds to weights really quickly," she notes. "Plus, my character is tougher on the show, so I want to make sure I try to bulk up."

Benson, who grew up as a dancer, adds that when she was first cast in the TV series *Stargate Universe*, she took up kickboxing "to toughen up a bit."

Filming for Season 2 recently wrapped up.

While she has some other upcoming projects to help her stay motivated to keep fit between seasons, Benson admits she goes through phases of being more and less active.

Yup, she's only human.

"It's ups and downs," she explains. "But for me, the key is to try and be as consistent as you can with things and let yourself off the hook. Sometimes you're not going to be able to get to the gym because work is too busy or you're too tired."

That relaxed attitude extends to her diet.

Benson doesn't beat herself up for the occasional dietary splurge.

"I don't punish myself for eating dessert here and there. It's about balance," she says. "But I love healthy food. So I eat a lot of salads, chicken, fish and vegetables. And I start most days with oatmeal."

A graduate of the University of British Columbia, where she received degrees in theatre and psychology, Benson knows that looking good is paramount in her profession.

But she figures keeping fit would be important to her no matter what she did for a living.

"As an actor, it's just part of our job," she says. "But beyond that, I think it's really important in life and it does make you just feel better about everything. You have more energy. You're sharper mentally. And everything works better in life."

Cary Castagna is a certified personal trainer through Can-Fit-Pro.

Visit the Keeping Fit blog at <http://blogs.canoe.ca/keepingfit>.

Julia's health and fitness tips:

- 1) Choose a physical activity you enjoy. There are so many different things you can do – just going for a hike, going for a walk, just getting out and doing something, getting some fresh air.
- 2) Maintain balance in your life. Don't punish yourself for occasionally eating dessert.
- 3) Realize the importance of health and fitness. When you're active, your quality of life goes up.