**The single best type of exercise for your brain, according to scientists**

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* Sunday 14 May 2017 12:32 BST

Want an all-natural way to lift your mood, improve your memory, and protect your brain against age-related cognitive decline?

Get moving.

A wealth of recent research, including two new studies published this spring, suggests that any type of exercise that raises your heart rate and gets you moving and sweating for a sustained period of time -- known as aerobic exercise -- has a significant, overwhelmingly beneficial impact on the brain.

"Aerobic exercise is the key for your head, just as it is for your heart," write the authors of a recent article in the Harvard Medical School blog "Mind and Mood."

While some of the benefits -- like a lift in mood -- can emerge as soon as a few minutes into a sweaty bike ride, others -- like improved memory -- might take several weeks to crop up. That means that the best type of fitness for your mind is any aerobic exercise that you can do regularly and consistently for at least 45 minutes at a time.

Depending on which benefits you're looking for, you might try adding a brisk walk or a jog to your daily routine. A pilot study in people with severe depression found that just 30 minutes of treadmill walking for 10 consecutive days was "sufficient to produce a clinically relevant and statistically significant reduction in depression." Aerobic workouts can also help people who aren't suffering from clinical depression feel less stressed by helping to reduce levels of the body's natural stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, according to a recent study in the Journal of Physical Therapy Science.

If you're over 50, a study published last month in the British Journal suggests the best results come from combining aerobic and resistance exercise, which could include anything from high-intensity interval training, like the 7-minute workout, to dynamic flow yoga, which intersperses strength-building poses like planks and push-ups with heart-pumping dance-like moves. Another study published May 3 provides some additional support to that research, finding that in adults aged 60-88, walking for 30 minutes four days a week for 12 weeks appeared to strengthen connectivity in a region of the brain where weakened connections have been linked with memory loss.

Researchers still aren't sure why this type of exercise appears to provide a boost to the brain, but studies suggest it has to do with increased blood flow, which provides our minds with fresh energy and oxygen. And one recent study in older women who displayed potential symptoms of dementia found that aerobic exercise was linked with an increase in the size of the hippocampus, a brain area involved in learning and memory.

Joe Northey, the lead author of the British study and an exercise scientist at the University of Canberra, says his research suggests that anyone in good health over age 50 should do 45 minutes to an hour of aerobic exercise "on as many days of the week as feasible."