**Secret to a sharper memory over 50? 45 minutes of gentle exercise such as tai chi and yoga several times a week**

* **Researchers claim at least one session a week can help improve brain capacity**
* **Added that yoga could be adopted by elders unable to take on vigorous exercise**
* **But Australian academics said swimming and weight lifting were just as effective**

By [Ben Spencer, Medical Correspondent For The Daily Mail](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Ben+Spencer,+Medical+Correspondent+For+The+Daily+Mail)

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* [e-mail](mailto:?subject=Read%20this:%20Secret%20to%20a%20sharper%20memory%20over%2050?%2045%20minutes%20of%20gentle%20exercise%20such%20as%20tai%20chi%20and%20yoga%20several%20times%20a%20week&body=Secret%20to%20a%20sharper%20memory%20over%2050%3F%2045%20minutes%20of%20gentle%20exercise%20such%20as%20tai%20chi%20and%20yoga%20several%20times%20a%20week%0A%0AExperts%20based%20at%20the%20University%20of%20Canberra%20in%20Australia%20found%20taking%20part%20in%20a%2045-minute%20session%20at%20least%20once%20a%20week%20helped%20to%20improve%20thinking%2C%20attention%20and%20memory%20skills.%0A%0Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Fhealth%2Farticle-4442448%2FYoga-key-50s-want-boost-brain-power.html%3Fito%3Demail_share_article-top%0A%0A%0AMost%20Read%20Articles%3A%0A%0ASecrets%20to%20a%20celebrity%20body%3A%20Trainer%20to%20Jennifer%20Aniston%2C%20Julia%20Roberts%20and%20Drew%20Barrymore%20reveals%20how%20YOU%20can%20get%20an%20A-list%20figure%0Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Fhealth%2Farticle-4559850%2FTrainer-Jennifer-Aniston-gives-tips.html%3Fito%3Demail_share_article-top_most-read-articles%0A%0AWould%20you%20put%20ground-up%20WASP%20NESTS%20in%20your%20vagina%3F%20Gynecologist%20warns%20against%20dangerous%20new%20trend%20that%20promises%20to%20tighten%2C%20clean%20and%20rejuvenate%20your%20genitals%0Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Fhealth%2Farticle-4560228%2FWomen-putting-ground-wasp-nests-vagina-tighten-it.html%3Fito%3Demail_share_article-top_most-read-articles%0A%0A%27Alien%27%20baby%20born%20with%204%20LEGS%20has%20her%20extra%20limbs%20removed%20during%20a%20complex%20operation%0Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Fhealth%2Farticle-4559130%2FAlien-baby-born-4-LEGS-finally-normal.html%3Fito%3Demail_share_article-top_most-read-articles%0A%0A)

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Tai chi and yoga could be the key for over-50s who want to boost their brain power, researchers claim.

Experts found taking part in a 45-minute session at least once a week helped to improve thinking, attention and memory skills.

Other forms of exercise also help improve cognition, including aerobic activities such as swimming and resistance and weight training, which the researchers found were all ‘similarly effective’.

But they said tai chi – an ancient Chinese exercise based on slow, flowing movements and balance – was particularly useful because it could be adopted by older people unwilling or unable to take on vigorous exercise.

The Australian academics said: ‘It is an important finding because non-traditional modes of exercise, such as tai chi, may be suitable for less functional populations.’

Previous studies have shown that exercise boosts brain power but the researchers said theirs was the most comprehensive to date.

The team, from the University of Canberra, assessed 39 published studies that tested the impact of exercise on the brain health of the over-50s.

They wrote: ‘Physical exercise significantly improved cognitive function in adults older than 50 years.’

Experts are increasingly aware that exercise for older adults helps ward off or halt a decline in brain health and cognitive abilities. The NHS advises that people of all ages do 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week, such as walking or cycling, or 75 minutes of strenuous exercise such as running or football.

But four in five Britons fail to achieve the target.

In China, 200million people practise tai chi daily. The slow, flowing exercises build muscle and bone, improve balance and strengthen joints. It also requires intense concentration, which is thought to be one of the reasons it helps brain health.

Writing in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, the researchers wrote: ‘Tai chi may be a promising intervention aimed at brain health for the over-50s, although further trials are required.’

Experts last night said any form of exercise was beneficial, even in old age.

Dr David Reynolds, of the charity Alzheimer’s Research UK, said: ‘Exercising doesn’t have to mean spending lots of time in the gym.

‘The best way of sticking to an exercise programme is to find something you enjoy. A brisk walk, tennis or going swimming can all form part of an active lifestyle.’

Dr Doug Brown, of the Alzheimer’s Society, said: ‘The benefits of regular exercise to keep a sharp mind are becoming clearer. People who exercise are less likely to develop dementia.’

Walking is better than cycling for the brain because the action of your feet striking the ground boosts blood flow, scientists have found.

As your foot hits the ground, the impact sends pressure waves up the arteries, boosting the circulation of blood around the brain.

Cyclists do not benefit because riding a bike does not involve any impact, the researchers at New Mexico Highlands University said.

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