Aerobics and weights for 45 minutes boosts brain power in over-50s, new study suggests

PUBLISHED: 11:30, Mon, Apr 24, 2017

COMBINING aerobic exercise with weights for just 45 minutes can boost brain power in the over fifties a new study reveals.

The combination of exercise works for everyone no matter what their brain health is like to start with.

Although exercise has long been held to prevent a decline in brainpower the new review of studies shows that it can actually increase the brain's function.

The team from the University of Canberra found that an aerobic workout such as jogging or swimming significantly increased cognitive abilities.

Meanwhile, resistance training such as using weights improved executive function, memory, and working memory.

They also found that tai chi increased cognitive function to a lesser extent, possibly helping those who were too frail to go jogging or lift weights.

The study, published online in the British Journal of Sports Medicine began because the evidence for exercise's benefits is inconclusive, largely because of overly restrictive inclusion criteria in the reviews published to date.

The team of researchers systematically reviewed 39 relevant studies published up to the end of 2016 to assess the potential impact of varying types, intensities, and durations of exercise on the brain health of the over 50s.

They looked at aerobic exercise, resistance training, multi-component exercise, which contains elements of both tai chi and yoga.

They then analysed the impact of these activities on overall brain capacity, attention, executive function (processes responsible for goal oriented behaviours), memory and short term memory.

The results showed that exercise improves the brain power of the over 50s, irrespective of the current state of their brain health.

10 common health myths

The researchers recommended prescribing both types of exercise to improve brain health in the over 50s.

They were more cautious about tai chi improving cognitive abilities as their analysis was based on just a few studies.

Lead author Joseph Northey a Teaching Fellow at the University of Canberra's Research Institute for Sport and Exercise said: "A session lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, of moderate to vigorous intensity, and of any frequency, was good for brain health.

"Physical exercise interventions are effective at improving the cognitive function of older adults, regardless of baseline cognitive status.

"Interventions of aerobic, resistance training, multicomponent training and tai chi were similarly effective.

"The findings suggest that an exercise programme with components of both aerobic and resistance type training, of at least moderate intensity and at least 45 minutes per session, on as many days of the week as possible, is beneficial to cognitive function in adults aged over 50."