**Aerobics, resistance training and tai chi can boost brain health in the elderly**

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AFP

Aerobic exercise improves cognitive abilities significantly, with resistance training having a major effect on executive function, memory, and working memory, say researchers.

A combination of both aerobics and resistance exercise can significantly boost brain power in people aged over 50, claims a new review.

Carried out by researchers from the University of Canberra, Australia, the new research is the most comprehensive review of the available evidence to date, with the team looking at 39 studies published up to the end of 2016.

The team analysed the effect of various types, intensities, and durations of exercise on the brain health of the over 50s, including aerobic exercise, resistance training such as weights, multi-component exercise that combines both aerobic and resistance training, tai chi, and yoga.

Cognitive abilities assessed in the review included overall brain capacity, attention, executive function (mental process which help achieve goals), memory, and working memory (processing information in the short-term).

The results showed that aerobic exercise significantly improved cognitive abilities, with resistance training having a significant effect on executive function, memory, and working memory.

For those wondering how much they need to do, the team found that a session lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, of moderate to vigorous intensity, and of any frequency, had a positive effect on cognitive function.

In addition, these positive effects were seen no matter what the current state of the participant’s brain health.

The team also found that tai chi helped improved cognitive abilities, supporting previous findings. The team did point out however that the analysis was based on just a few studies and the findings would need to be confirmed in a larger study, although the results do suggest that exercises such as tai chi could provide benefits for those who are unable to do more intense forms of physical activity.

The team now believe that the evidence from their review is strong enough to recommend prescribing both aerobic and resistance exercises to improve brain health in the over 50s.

The findings can be found published online in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.