**45 minutes of exercise for over-50s can 'significantly' improve brain function, study finds**

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**BY**MIRROR.CO.UK

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Aerobic exercise and resistance training both had a positive effect on the brain

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[**Exercising**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/fitness) for just 45 minutes several times a week can ‘significantly’ boost [**brain power**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/lifestyle/health/) in the over-50s, a major study has found.

Aerobic exercise enhanced cognitive abilities while resistance training had a pronounced effect on executive function, memory, and working memory.

The evidence is so strong that it is enough to recommend prescribing both types of exercise to improve brain health in the over 50s, the researchers said.

The data showed that tai chi also improved cognitive abilities.

This is an important finding, the authors suggested, because exercises like tai chi may be suitable for people who are unable to do more challenging forms of physical activity.

Several types of exercise help improve thinking, attention, memory skills and executive function (mental skills that help people get things done), a new analysis of 39 studies found.

Aerobic exercise such as swimming, cycling and jogging; resistance training including weights, multicomponent training (such as combined aerobic and weight training) and tai chi were all ‘similarly effective’, experts writing in the British Journal of Sports Medicine said.

They said: “Positive benefits to cognition occurred with an exercise intervention that included tai chi, or resistance and aerobic training, prescribed either in isolation or combined.”

And the benefits were irrespective of the current state of an individual’s brain health, they added.

An ideal exercise ‘prescription’ for the over-50s would include an ‘exercise programme with components of both aerobic and resistance-type training, of at least moderate intensity and at least 45 min per session, on as many days of the week as possible’, the team from the University of Canberra in Australia said.

While only a small number of studies examining tai chi were included, the team said the findings on this were ‘important’ as it may be the type of exercise chosen by less mobile people who cannot take on more challenging exercise.

While previous studies have shown that exercise helps boost brain power, the researchers said theirs is the most comprehensive study to date.

Dr Allison Smith, head of strategy and development for Royal Voluntary Service, said: “Resistance-based exercise is critical as we get older, particularly following a period of illness, surgery or accident as we are most at risk of losing of muscle mass and strength.

“We know from a growing body of evidence that improved mobility helps older people to live more independent, fulfilled and happier lives”.

She said the charity’s own eight-month project with 44 people with an average age of 81 showed that resistance training improved physical function and well-being.

It more than halved the numbers reporting they were lonely, improved happiness and reduced the number saying they were extremely or very anxious.

Dr Doug Brown, director of research at Alzheimer’s Society, said: “The benefits of regular exercise to keep a sharp mind are becoming clearer.

“Previous studies show that people who exercise are less likely to develop dementia, but more research is needed to find out exactly what type and how much exercise is best to help reduce your risk of the condition.”

He said the present study did not aim to look specifically at dementia but did show that exercise improved performance on tests of thinking skills.