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**Exercise ‘prescription’ boosts brain power in the over 50s**  
  
**Taking exercise for at least 45 minutes several times a week can boost brain power in the over-50s, research suggests.**

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 study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine 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,” researchers said.

The benefits were irrespective of the current state of an individual’s brain health, the study found.

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 Angus Hunter, researcher in exercise physiology at the University of Stirling, said while the time commitment recommended in the study might seem daunting for some people, alternatives could be found.

“People in this age range will be dealing with the pressures of work and have family commitments too, so the recommended 45 minutes, perhaps three or four times a week might seem realistic.

“For some people it may be 100 per cent achievable, while for others it will be quite difficult.

“However, people can build up their time slowly and gradually, and rather than doing structured activities they can include exercise in their everyday life. This can include the exercise they get walking or cycling to work, walking the dog, or gardening which involves a lot of bending and stretching.”

Dr Hunter added: “Another method is to take short bursts of high-intensity exercise which can be done over 20 seconds which was researched by my colleague Dr Niels Vollaard, for example, on a statutory bike in the workplace.

“This means not having to get changed out of your suit or work clothes and so save on the time travelling to a gym.

“Ultimately if you can extend slightly more energy than you are taking in you will derive health benefits.”