**BRAIN TRAINING**

**Doctors should prescribe exercise to the over-50s to ‘help prevent dementia’ as walking ‘benefits the brain more than cycling’**

REVEALED

By Nick McDermott, Health Editor

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Scientists say that even one moderately intense 45-minute session a week can have an impact

**GPs should prescribe exercise to over-50s to help protect against dementia, research suggests.**

A major study found a mixture of aerobic exercise and weights “significantly” boosts brain power in older adults.

And even one moderately intense 45-minute session a week has an impact, however unfit the person.

Walking and running were found to boost overall brain health.

And lifting weights was found to protect memory and improve decision making.

Researchers from the University of Canberra in Australia examined 39 different studies.

They said the evidence was strong enough to recommend “prescribing exercise to improve brain health.”

The team conclude an ideal prescription would include a workout “programme with components of both aerobic and resistance-type training, of at least moderate intensity and at least 45 min per session”.

The study, published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, concluded older Brits should exercise “on as many days of the week as possible”.

NHS guidance simply states adults should do 150 minutes of activity a week.

Lead researcher Joseph Northey, from the University of Canberra, said: “Physical activity is an important modifiable risk factor for cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease, and dementia.

“The findings of our study provide very positive evidence that undertaking a combination of aerobic and resistance training of at least moderate intensity is of benefit to the brain function of people over the age of 50.

“Although the review did not include studies with participants that had a diagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, it did show there were similar benefits of exercise in people with and without mild levels of cognitive impairment.

“This is important as cognitive impairment…increases the risk of transitioning to a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease.”

Around 850,000 Brits have dementia.

There is no effective treatment, but current medications can help to slow down the symptoms.  
A quarter of women and a fifth of men in the UK are inactive.

Lack of physical activity costs Britain an estimated £7.4 billion a year, including £900 million to the NHS alone.

Dr Doug Brown, from the 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.”

Dr David Reynolds, Chief Scientific Officer at Alzheimer’s Research UK, encouraged older Brits to stay active.

He said: “This review underscores the link between exercise and brain health and, in line with guidance from the NHS, supports the idea that both strength exercises and aerobic activity can be beneficial for people as they get older. While these different types of exercise had positive effects on brain function, they had to be at least moderately intensive – the kind of activity that raises your heart rate and leaves you at least slightly out of breath.”