



GINKGO BILOBA

Enhances memory and promotes healthy cognitive function

More and more scientific studies show that an extract of ginkgo biloba leaf may benefit brain function. This popular extract is derived from an ornamental tree that graces streets across North America. Ginkgo biloba extract is one of the most frequently prescribed medicines in France and Germany, with over 5 million prescriptions dispensed per year in Germany alone. There are several reasons for ginkgo's effectiveness: the powerful extract improves blood flow to the brain and the rest of the body and it is a powerful antioxidant and free radical scavenger, helpful for many conditions, including impaired brain function.

While ginkgo ranks as one of the most well-researched herbs, most of the work has been done in Europe. In October 1997 the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) brought some of the research home to North America.

GINKGO FOR DEMENTIA

JAMA reported on a placebo-controlled, double-blind, randomized trial of ginkgo biloba showing that ginkgo was "safe and appears capable of stabilizing and, in a substantial number of cases, improving the cognitive performance and the social functioning of demented patients for 6 months to 1 year." (Le Bars, *et al.*) The concentrated extract derived from the leaves of ginkgo biloba, known as EGb 761, was given to patients with mild to moderately severe dementia. As a double-blind experiment, not even the researchers knew which patients received ginkgo biloba extract or placebo. When the results came in, patients given ginkgo had maintained their reasoning abilities and daily living skills – 20% had even improved – whereas those given placebo had deteriorated from the start of the study.

A 1986 review of the literature concluded that ginkgo "seems to be effective in patients with vascular disorders, in all types of dementia and even in patients suffering from cognitive disorders secondary to depression, because of its beneficial effects on mood. Of special concern are people who are just beginning to experience deterioration in their cognitive function... In addition, Ginkgo biloba extract appears to be a safe drug, being well-tolerated, even in doses many times higher than those usually recommended." (Warburton)

GINKGO AS AN ANTIOXIDANT

As an antioxidant, ginkgo is particularly helpful in protecting the brain's high proportion of unsaturated fats. Ginkgo bioflavonoids protect those fats from oxidation, and the extract has "proven itself effective in improving memory,

reducing the effects of head injury, improving concentration, accelerating learning, increasing blood flow and oxygenation of tissues throughout the body, improving the transmission of nerve signals, and generally improving brain function." (Reuben)

IMPROVED CIRCULATION WITH GINKGO

Best known for enhancing blood circulation, ginkgo relaxes the blood vessels and encourages blood flow to even the smallest capillaries, nourishing everything with oxygen-rich blood. "More than three hundred scientific papers have been published on ginkgo, many confirming that ginkgo stimulates blood flow feeding oxygen to tissues... Furthermore, ginkgo delivers healing oxygen and blood not only to the healthy areas of the brain, but specifically to disease-damaged areas, actually bringing new life to an aging brain." (Carper)

OTHER HEALTH BENEFITS

Platelet Activating Factor (PAF) is a substance in our body that helps blood platelets clump together. However, too much PAF promotes inflammation, asthma, and reduces blood flow to nerve cells. Standardized extracts of ginkgo contain terpenoid lactone fractions – ginkgolides A, B, C and bilobalide, constituents not found in any other plant – that inhibit production of PAF, making ginkgo biloba extract useful for inflammatory conditions, and protecting nerve cells from damage when blood flow is compromised. Dr. Mark Stengler, author of *The Natural Physician*, comments, "Ginkgo biloba extract is strongly indicated for people who have suffered or may be at risk for a stroke. It should be considered a primary treatment for stroke victims and in for transient ischemic attack (warning symptoms of a stroke). I recommend it to all my patients with any type of impaired blood flow to the head." (Stengler)

In Europe, ginkgo biloba extract is primarily prescribed for the middle-aged or elderly who suffer from circulation disorders or who just want to maintain their mental clarity. However, this extract has other benefits that might help a more youthful crowd. A study on healthy young women showed that 600 mg of ginkgo improved reaction time on one type of memory test. (Subhan) Ginkgo may improve ringing in the ears (tinnitus); lessen the inflammation associated with allergies and asthma; ease symptoms of peripheral vascular disease and Raynaud's syndrome; help recovery after head injuries or stroke, and other conditions where blood flow is a factor.

Most of the research on ginkgo has been done with a standardized extract that contains 24% ginkgo flavonglycosides and 6% terpene lactones including ginkgolides A,B,C, and bilobalide.

SAFETY

Ginkgo biloba extract is considered very safe; however, a small percentage of persons may experience mild stomach upset and headaches.

As ginkgo markedly improves blood circulation, persons on blood thinning medication or who have blood clotting disorders, should check with a qualified health care practitioner before taking ginkgo.

DOSAGE

Normal dosages of standardized ginkgo biloba extract range from 120 milligrams daily to 240 milligrams in divided doses. "Daily dosages of 240 milligrams may be required in some cases of cerebrovascular insufficiency, early-stage Alzheimer's disease, resistant depression, and minor head injury." (Brown)

KEY REFERENCES

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