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K-STATE Research and Extension
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Herbs

Ginkgo

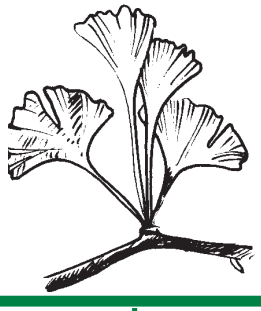
Ginkgo biloba

What are the folklore uses of ginkgo?

Ginkgo has been used traditionally to treat memory loss, improve brain function, relieve depression and increase blood supply to the brain.

What is ginkgo?

The herb comes from the leaves of the ginkgo tree. The leaves are broken down in a process that forms a concentrate called ginkgo biloba extract, or GBE. When manufactured according to German standards, GBE has a potency of 24 percent flavenoids and 6 percent terpenes, both of which are antioxidants.



What are ginkgo's proposed medicinal purposes?

Ginkgo has been used to improve circulation by acting as a blood thinner. It may improve memory, due to its blood-thinning effect and its antioxidant characteristics. Increased blood flow also may treat or prevent mild headaches, ringing in the ears and depression.

How effective is ginkgo?

No studies have shown evidence that ginkgo will help improve memory in healthy people or help individuals with severe dementia. Some studies have shown a relationship between the blood thinning effects of ginkgo and improvement in short-term memory and concentration.

What are the side effects and safety concerns of ginkgo?

No major side effects have been associated with ginkgo. Minor side effects may include gastrointestinal disturbances, such as diarrhea, nausea and vomiting; headaches; and allergic skin reactions. If these symptoms occur, the user either should stop taking the herb, or reduce the amount taken to a lower dosage.

Because ginkgo is a blood-thinner, do not use it while taking other blood-thinning agents, including aspirin, vitamin E, garlic, warafin (the prescription drug Coumadin) or any other drug that lists blood-thinning as a potential side effect.

What forms and dosages of ginkgo are recommended?

Ginkgo is available as a solid or liquid. GBE is sold as a health supplement in the United States, either singly or combined with other ingredients. Tablets usually contain 40 milligrams of ginkgo and may be taken with food three times a day. Research suggests four to six weeks of treatment may be needed before improvement is noted. If there is no improvement within that time, it is not likely to occur. There are no medicinal benefits from drinking ginkgo teas.

Conclusion

An individual who experiences significant loss in recall or concentration ability should be examined by a physician. Clinical studies indicate that GBE promotes vasodilation and improves blood flow in the arteries and capillaries. While not a cure-all, there appears to be significant scientific evidence to support ginkgo's use in improvement of memory, concentration and mental focus in some impaired elderly indidivuals.

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Sources:

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

MF-2382 MARCH 1999

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File code: Foods and Nutrition 2-2 NP