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GINKGO BILOBA

Ginkgo is a well known herbal or natural medicine that is most commonly thought to be useful for memory, prevention and/or treatment of Alzheimer's related dementia, Raynaud's disease, erectile dysfunction, multiple sclerosis and tinnitus.

Ginkgo biloba, commonly known as ginkgo or gingko (both pronounced )/'gɪŋkoʊ/, also known as the maidenhair tree, is the only living species in the division Ginkgophyta, all others being extinct. It is found in fossils dating back 270 million years. Native to China, the tree is widely cultivated, and was cultivated early in human history. The active compounds found in Ginkgo include flavonoids, bioflavonoids, proanthocyanidins, and trilactonic diterpenes (ginkgolide A, B, C). The most common mechanisms of action include anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, cerebral glucose utilization, reduced platelet aggregation, neurotransmitter regulation, and vasomotor effects.

Ginkgo biloba is available in many forms, such as, capsules, liquid extract, and dried leaf which can be used in teas. As for product labeled use, under the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA), the sale of ginkgo biloba is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a dietary supplement. As for the off-label use, there are a few studies done that debunked the claims of treatment using Ginkgo biloba but are used instead as a placebo effect factor. There are also scientific studies that support some, but not all Ginkgo benefits.

In a research review published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease in 2015, for instance, scientists analyzed nine previously published clinical trials focusing on ginkgo biloba's possible role in the treatment of cognitive impairment and dementia. All of the trials focused on a ginkgo biloba extract called EGb761.

In their conclusion, the review's authors state that taking 240 mg of EGb761 per day for at least 22 weeks may stabilize or slow decline in cognition, function, and behavior in patients with cognitive impairment or dementia. However, an earlier report published in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews in 2009 concluded that evidence for ginkgo biloba's effects against dementia and cognitive impairment is inconsistent and unreliable. Unfortunately, most of the research evidence data is from animal or in-vitro analysis, thus making the extrapolation of information into humans with supporting clinically relevant outcomes more difficult.

Apart from the positive benefits, Ginkgo biloba consumption also comes with side effects such as allergic skin reactions, diarrhea, digestive problems, dizziness, headaches, muscle weakness, and nausea. Ginkgo biloba is also known to work against blood clotting as it is known as a blood thinner. Therefore it shouldn't be used by people with bleeding disorders or those who are taking

medication or supplements that affect blood clotting, such as warfarin, aspirin, garlic and vitamin E. Individuals with epilepsy or diabetes should also avoid use of ginkgo biloba, unless the herb is taken under the supervision of a medical professional. Pregnant and breast feeding women shouldn't take ginkgo. There has not been any studies shown to indicate any oral manifestation when consuming ginkgo biloba.

As a health educator, my knowledge on natural products should be in depth and very extensive especially with the most common mechanism of actions of natural and drugs interactions. While reviewing medical history with a patient that is currently taking Ginkgo, I would be very comfortable to explain it's usage and associated risks including an explanation of drug interactions with Ginkgo.



Ginkgo Biloba as it appears in nature.



Ginkgo Biloba as packaged for consumer use.

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