

# Can an herb improve your memory?



# Ginkgo biloba shows promise

By **CHRYSS CADA**  
The Coloradan

**A**re you always misplacing your car keys?

Do you have trouble putting a name to a familiar face?

Have you ever headed out on an errand only to forget where you're going?

If so, there's a name you should remember — ginkgo biloba.

Ginkgo biloba is a tree that dates back 200 million years, longer than any other species of tree. Extract from the plant's leaves has been used to enhance memory and other cerebral functions for an estimated 4,000 years. Three months ago, its healing properties were legitimized when ginkgo (pronounced GINK-o) received the American Medical Association's stamp of approval.

One of the best-selling herbs in Europe, ginkgo has slowly been gaining popularity as a "memory-aid" in the United States.

In the Oct. 22 issue of the AMA's *Journal*, a study was published that confirmed ginkgo's ability to aid in the fight against something much more serious than a simple case of poor memory. The report stated that ginkgo could slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

While the research is encouraging, it is premature to recommend ginkgo as a specific treatment for Alzheimer's disease, according to Laury Dennis, director of the Fort Collins office of the Alzheimer's Association's Rocky Mountain Chapter.

"I haven't heard of anyone taking ginkgo specifically for the treatment of Alzheimer's," Dennis said. "I think people are more likely to approach their physician for a prescription of a more traditional drug."

If those more traditional therapies don't work, people living with Alzheimer's might end up paying a visit to an herbalist, such as Susan Mead.

"A lot of people come to me after they've tried everything and nothing is working," Mead said. "Then they consider trying something natural."

Mead, who was designated a master herbalist after a course of study with the Artemis Institute in Boulder, prescribes ginkgo for clients who have Alzheimer's in their family history. But that's not all she prescribes it for.

"Although ginkgo is most widely associated with Alzheimer's, it is also very effective in the treatment of a variety of other illness," she said. "I've found it particularly useful in the treatment of bronchial congestion."



V. Richard Haro

**THE NATURAL WAY:** Susan Mead, a master herbalist from Fort Collins, makes herbal extract remedies in her home.

**I**n a selection of articles from the Herb Research Foundation in Boulder, ginkgo is said to aid in recovery from stroke, increasing memory and reaction time; prevention of heart attack; and treatment of impotence, hearing loss, chronic ringing in the ears, chronic dizziness and asthma.

Ginkgo's benefits stem from its ability to increase blood flow in the body. The herb has been the subject of more than 300 scientific studies, the results of which are wide-ranging and complex, according to Herb Research Foundation materials.

A French study involving 166 patients at five hospitals evaluated ginkgo in the treatment of cerebral disorders due to aging. Within three months, the treated group was showing significant improvement compared to controls.

Mead's confidence in ginkgo and other herbs comes not from the laboratory, but from the real world.

"There's been thousands of years of experimentation with herbs," she said. "Those real-life stories mean a lot more to me than numbers from a controlled laboratory experiment."

All studies available at the Herb Research Foundation note that the effects of ginkgo are cumulative, with conditions improving increasingly over time.

"The worst thing that will happen with taking herbs and trying to treat yourself is that you might waste some money," Mead said. "Chances are they probably will work."

"These are herbs that have proven themselves over thousands of years."

## About ginkgo

Because ginkgo has some toxicity, it shouldn't be taken everyday for long periods of time, recommends herbalist Susan Mead.

To avoid any toxicity build-up, consider taking ginkgo five or six days a week rather than seven, she suggests. Licorice root can be taken in conjunction with ginkgo to help balance out its toxicity.

The usual dosage of ginkgo is 40 mg. of a 24 percent ginkgolide extract, three times daily, according to an article by Rob McCaleb, president of the Herb Research Foundation.

As with any food, supplement or drug, some people may experience allergic or "idiosyncratic" reactions that would not affect most people, according to HRF materials.

As with most herbs, and in fact most foods, ginkgo has not been extensively researched for drug interactions.

## Resources

■ Susan Mead is a master herbalist with a practice in Fort Collins. She creates herbal combinations specific to the individual needs of her clients. She can be reached at 282-3669.

■ The Alzheimer's Association Rocky Mountain Chapter serves the 50,000 people in Colorado with Alzheimer's disease, their caregivers and healthcare professionals with services including support groups, family counseling and educational and training seminars.

For more information about Alzheimer's research, and programs to assist people with the disease, their caregivers and family members, call the Alzheimer's Association Fort Collins office at 282-9109.

■ The Herb Research Foundation of Boulder is an internationally recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to disseminating factual information about herbs and the value of medicinal plants in modern medicine. Call (800) 748-2617 to receive details on HRF herb information packs, research services or memberships.