Herb Of The Month

June 1, 2000 By Michael Onstott

Ginkgo Biloba

Parts: Leaves
Forms: Extract (capsules, tablets or liquid), tea
Uses: Poor circulation, brain dysfunction, ringing in ears
Daily dose: Capsules/tablets: 80–180 milligrams (divided into 2 or 3 doses); liquid extract: 2–3 droppers, 2 or 3 times; leaves: 3–6 grams (steeped as tea)
Monthly cost: $7–$24
Caution: Consult physician about possibly dangerous interactions with blood-thinning agents (such as Coumadin, aspirin or vitamin E)

Is ginkgo biloba a “smart pill”? Not quite. But Chinese herbalists have used extracts of the elegant, fan-shaped leaves (from the world’s oldest surviving tree species) for centuries to “benefit the brain.” Ginkgo’s active chemicals, flavanoids and terpenoids improve blood circulation to the brain and body extremities by reducing blood platelet stickiness and strengthening and dilating blood vessels. More than 400 studies—most using a German standardized extract—support the use of the antioxidant herb in treating circulation-related problems such as short-term memory loss, poor concentration, vertigo and dizziness, headaches, ringing in the ears, altitude sickness, varicose veins and hardening of the arteries in the legs. According to recent research, ginkgo also shows promise for combating symptoms of Alzheimer’s, dementia, depression, heart disease and even antidepressant-induced male impotency (“erectile dysfunction”). So ginkgo may not get you admitted to Mensa, but it can help you go with the flow—a better blood flow, that is.

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