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Phytomedicine. 2011 Nov 15;18(14):1202-7. Epub 2011 Jul 30.

Specific memory effects of Ginkgo biloba extract EGb 761 in middle-aged healthy volunteers.

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: Recent reviews showed that **Ginkgo biloba** extract EGb 761(1) is effective to enhance performance in patients with cognitive impairment (e.g., dementia). The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of EGb 761 on **memory** and the specificity of such effects on distinct **memory** functions in middle-aged healthy volunteers.

METHODS: A total of 188 healthy subjects aged 45-56 years were randomised to receive EGb 761 (240 mg once daily) or placebo for 6 weeks. Outcome measures were the change in **memory** performance in a demanding standardised free recall paradigm (list of appointments) and a less demanding standardised recognition test (driving-route). Based on previous findings we predicted superiority of EGb 761 in recall testing. Specificity in effects was assessed by separating immediate vs. delayed and quantitative vs. qualitative free recall measures.

RESULTS: After 6 weeks, EGb 761-treated subjects improved significantly in quantity of recall, i.e., the number of correctly recalled appointments (drug-placebo differences: $p=0.038$ for immediate and $p=0.008$ for delayed recall). Effects on qualitative recall performance (ratio of false to correct items) were similar (drug-placebo differences: $p=0.092$ for immediate and $p=0.010$ for delayed recall). No superiority of **Ginkgo** was evident in another everyday **memory** test which asked for recognition of a driving route (drug-placebo differences: $p>0.10$). The incidence of adverse events was low and not significantly different between treatment groups.

DISCUSSION: EGb 761 (240 mg once daily) improves free recall of appointments in middle-aged healthy volunteers, which requires high demands on self-initiated retrieval of learned material. This function is known to be sensitive to normal aging, i.e., reduced in healthy middle-aged subjects. No effects are seen in a less demanding everyday **memory** task which does not tap this critical function. This ties in with previous studies which found specific patterns of benefit from EGb 761 in demanding cognitive tasks.

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PMID: 21802920 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

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