

November 18, 2008

New JAMA Study on Ginkgo Biloba and Alzheimer's "Misses the Boat Entirely"

Study Too Limited and Ignores Critical Risk Factors, Says Natural Products Association

A new study questioning the benefits of Ginkgo biloba on preventing dementia and Alzheimer's disease (AD) late in life "misses the boat entirely" because the universe of people studied is too limited to make broad statements about the benefits of the popular dietary supplement, said the Natural Products Association. The study's conclusions are also in direct contrast to other peer-reviewed studies that show benefits, and will almost certainly be questioned, the association said. The study was released November 18, 2008, in *JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association*.

"This study is not irrelevant, but it can not be used to make broad conclusions about Ginkgo biloba and the general population. In fact, it misses the boat entirely in two critical areas. One, it looks exclusively at people almost 80 years old who are far more likely to have Alzheimer's, while ignoring those in middle ages, where the risk for developing the disease rises quickly and prevention could best be analyzed. Two, it excludes completely any consideration of the strong and established role that family history plays with Alzheimer's. You can't do a study on the weather without looking at wind and rain," said Daniel Fabricant, Ph.D., vice president for scientific and regulatory affairs at the Natural Products Association.

"This study is also in direct contrast to other research. Unfortunately, there is still no proven treatment to prevent Alzheimer's, but reputable research has shown that Ginkgo biloba can play a constructive role in improving the symptoms related to this debilitating disease and possibly delaying its onset," said Fabricant.

BACKGROUND:

- According to the National Institute on Aging, age is the most important known risk factor for AD. The risk of developing the disease doubles every 5 years over age 65. Several studies estimate that up to half the people older than 85 have AD. These facts are significant because of the growing number of people 65 and older. More than 34 million Americans are now 65 or older. Even more significant, the group with the highest risk of AD—those older than 85—is the fastest growing population group in the country.
- A 1997 study in the U.S. suggested that a Ginkgo extract may be of some help in treating the symptoms of AD and multi-infarct dementia, but no evidence exists that Ginkgo biloba will prevent AD.
- Research shows that risk for the disease becomes significant in middle age for most of the population, yet this study ignores that completely.