

Ginkgo for MS

PORTLAND, Ore. (Ivanhoe Newswire) -- Sixty percent of patients with multiple sclerosis have trouble concentrating and paying attention. There are no drugs to treat these symptoms, but an herb commonly used for memory may help this group.

When Mimi Tarro talks to her husband, she often asks him the same questions over and over again. She says: "An hour later I'll say, 'Now, what are you doing today? When are you coming home?'" She also has trouble remembering people and words. "I'm always going, 'It's like, you know, the thingamajig that fits inside the whatchamacallit, because I can't think of either one of those names."

Tarro's forgetfulness is a common symptom of multiple sclerosis, a disease that damages nerve fibers and impairs brain activity.

Nothing can repair the damage, but in a small study, the herb Ginkgo biloba improved awareness by 15 percent. That study, along with positive results in Alzheimer's patients, prompted neurologist Dennis Bourdette, M.D., to start his own clinical trial at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland. He says, "If we demonstrate that Ginkgo is beneficial, we'll have a safe, inexpensive agent in a situation where we have nothing else to offer."

Tarro took Ginkgo for three years and noticed a difference. "It wasn't like this big miracle that happened. It just was that I wasn't struggling," she says.

Although it's not a proven theory, doctors say it is a simple step in the right direction.

Though it appears to work for MS patients, Ginkgo did not improve memory in a recent trial of older patients who did not have MS. The herb can cause bleeding problems, so you should consult your doctor before taking it.