A Note from the Principal Investigator

Welcome to the GEM Study! You are part of a very unique and special group, along with nationally recognized scientists and other volunteers like yourself. We have joined forces as a team to battle the strong adversary of dementia.

In various ways, someone with dementia has touched us all. We hear of the courageous battle former president Ronald Reagan wages against Alzheimer's disease, and we watch with admiration the strength and dignity of his family. Many of us have seen first hand how dementia affects the memory, thinking, and personality in our sisters, brothers, parents, spouses, or friends. In fact, as many as one-third to one-half of people over 75 years old develop dementia. The most serious form, Alzheimer's disease, currently affects four million people in the U.S. Even more significant is that an estimated 14 million baby boomers—your children and grandchildren—are at risk for developing dementia. That is, unless someone does something now to prevent or delay its development. And, together, that is exactly what we aim to do!

In this first issue of the Ginkgo Gazette:

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You Must Remember This: The Importance of Taking Pills Consistently

For many people, remembering to take medication is difficult. For participants in a research study like GEM, remembering to take the study pills consistently can also be a challenge—especially when you’re not taking the pills for a current illness. But consistent pill-taking is extremely important. We will have conclusive answers about whether Ginkgo biloba can prevent memory loss only if participants take their pills as directed.

In addition, an accurate record of your pill habits is as important as consistently taking your pills. It is very important for us to track how many pills you miss. Sooner or later, everyone will miss a pill or two—or possibly even a few days’ worth! Just remember to leave all missed pills in their blister packs and return every blister pack—empty, full, or partially finished—to the clinic.

We know that remembering to take every study pill will be challenging, and we appreciate your efforts! Every pill you take is one small step closer to better health for future generations.

Tips for Remembering to Take Your GEM Study Pills
• Think “GEM”: Ginkgo Evening and Morning.
• Take a pill at the same time every day.
• Incorporate your pill-taking into an established routine: take a pill with breakfast and dinner or before you go to sleep and when you wake up.
• Keep the pills where they’re easy to find: on the dining room table, if you take them with meals, or on your nightstand, if you take them when you go to sleep and wake up.
• Put a reminder note in a place where you’ll always see it, such as on the bathroom mirror, on the refrigerator, or on your bedroom door.
• Ask a friend or family member to help you remember when it’s time to take your pill.
• Every time you take your pill, set an alarm clock or timer to remind you when it’s time for your next pill.

Feeling Some Side Effects?

If you think you’re having side effects from the pills, try taking them with or without food, or changing the times you take them. People who have symptoms often just need a little time to adjust. If you are concerned that you may be having side effects from your pills, we will be happy to work with you to relieve any symptoms.

Also, please remember there is no way to tell whether you are taking ginkgo or a placebo! On the one hand, many people who take ginkgo supplements report feeling no drug effects at all; on the other hand, the “placebo effect” can be powerful, making people feel better, even if they’re not actually taking the drug, and causing them to experience the same side effects as people taking the actual medication.
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When the GEM Study is completed, we hope to have answers to several important questions. First and foremost, we hope to have scientific evidence of whether or not Ginkgo biloba can prevent or delay the onset of dementia—specifically Alzheimer's disease—in older adults. In addition, we are confident that other questions can be answered concerning how Ginkgo biloba affects other diseases such as atherosclerosis—"hardening of the arteries"—or blockages in blood vessels in the heart, brain, and other parts of the body that lead to heart attack, stroke, and other deadly and debilitating conditions.

You are in great company by participating in the GEM Study. Scientists and volunteers like you from around the world are racing to find solutions to dementia-related conditions. Just recently, tremendous progress has been made through aggressive research. For example, a vaccine has been developed that shows great promise in stopping the chemical process in the brain that results in Alzheimer's disease, and safety trials are underway. One of the components that starts this chemical process has also been identified, and treatments are being created to inhibit its development. Scientists are studying how the brain generates new cells on its own, offering another possible strategy to treat Alzheimer’s disease and other brain conditions. Others have identified a memory condition in some people who have an increased likelihood of developing Alzheimer's disease—therefore identifying a high risk group that would benefit greatly from aggressive prevention efforts. Benjamin Franklin's aphorism is still true that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. You are going to help us find out about this!

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, shares our enthusiasm and has been extremely supportive of the GEM Study. The project is so important that several other NIH groups have joined in the support, including the National Institute on Aging, the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, and the National Institute for Neurological Diseases and Stroke.

You are participating in the world’s only large-scale prevention trial of Ginkgo biloba. Spread the word so that others may join this landmark study and be part of the solution. Take pride in the contribution you are making to the health of others, especially your own children and grandchildren. On behalf of the GEM Study investigators and staff, I thank you for your time and commitment, as we begin our journey.

Steven T. DeKosky, M.D.
University of Pittsburgh
Winter Crisp

Prepare the filling. In a medium bowl combine sugar, flour, and lemon peel; mix well. Add lemon juice, apples, and cranberries; stir to mix. Spoon into a lightly greased 6-cup baking dish.

Prepare the topping. In a small bowl, combine oats, brown sugar, flour, and cinnamon. Add melted margarine; stir to mix.

Sprinkle the topping over the filling. Bake at 375 degrees F for approximately 40-50 minutes or until filling is bubbly and top is brown. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Yield: 6 servings, each providing: 284 calories; 6 g total fat; 1 g saturated fat; 0 mg cholesterol; 56 mg sodium.

Summer Crisp

Prepare as above, substituting 4 cups fresh or unsweetened frozen (thawed) peaches and 3 cups fresh or unsweetened frozen (unthawed) blueberries for the apples and cranberries. If the peaches are frozen, thaw them completely but do not drain. Do not thaw the blueberries before mixing, or they will be crushed.

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