

# Abstract

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## A review of nutrients and botanicals in the integrative management of cognitive dysfunction.

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**BACKGROUND:** Dementias and other severe cognitive dysfunction states pose a daunting challenge to existing medical management strategies. An integrative, early intervention approach seems warranted. Whereas, allopathic treatment options are highly limited, nutritional and botanical therapies are available which have proven degrees of efficacy and generally favorable benefit-to-risk profiles.

**FINDINGS:** This review covers five such therapies: phosphatidylserine (PS), acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC), vinpocetine, Ginkgo biloba extract (GbE), and Bacopa monniera (Bacopa). PS is a phospholipid enriched in the brain, validated through double-blind trials for improving memory, learning, concentration, word recall, and mood in middle-aged and elderly subjects with dementia or age-related cognitive decline. PS has an excellent benefit-to-risk profile. ALC is an energizer and metabolic cofactor which also benefits various cognitive functions in the middle-aged and elderly, but with a slightly less favorable benefit-to-risk profile. Vinpocetine, found in the lesser periwinkle *Vinca minor*, is an excellent vasodilator and cerebral metabolic enhancer with proven benefits for vascular-based cognitive dysfunction. Two meta-analyses of GbE demonstrate the best preparations offer limited benefits for vascular insufficiencies and even more limited benefits for Alzheimer's, while "commodity" GbE products offer little benefit, if any at all. GbE (and probably also vinpocetine) is incompatible with blood-thinning drugs. Bacopa is an Ayurvedic botanical with apparent anti-anxiety, anti-fatigue, and memory-strengthening effects.

**SUMMARY:** These five substances offer interesting contributions to a personalized approach for restoring cognitive function, perhaps eventually in conjunction with the judicious application of growth factors.

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