

Botanical Pathways

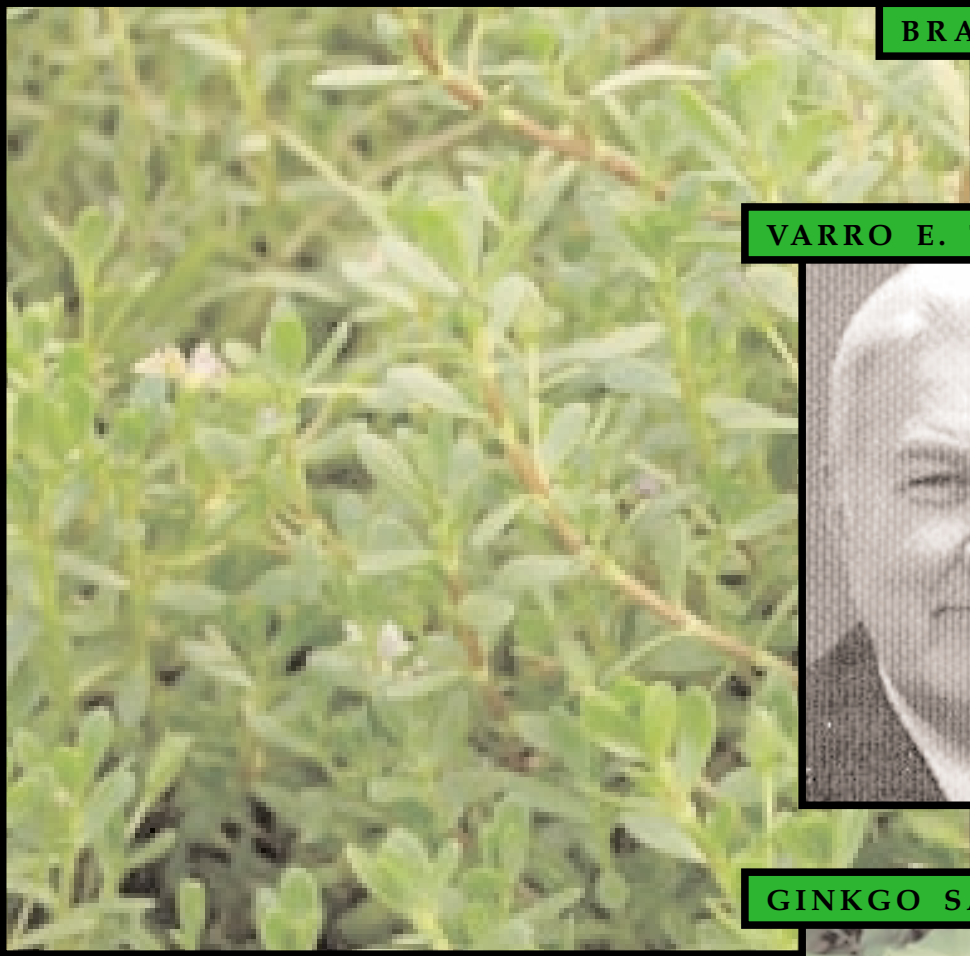
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Brahmi Update by Hans Wohlmut

Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*) is an Ayurvedic herb currently enjoying popularity as a 'brain herb', primarily due to its effects on cognitive function (for a review of brahmi, see Botanical Pathways Issue 8).

Two studies on the effect of brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*) on cognitive function have recently been published by a research group based at the Brain Sciences Institute at the Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. The studies investigated the acute and chronic effects, respectively, of a standardised ethanolic brahmi extract on cognitive function in healthy subjects.

In the acute study, which employed a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled design, 38 subjects underwent baseline neuropsychological testing prior to taking a single dose of either brahmi (300 mg extract standardised to contain no less than 55% bacosides A and B, equivalent to 6 g dried herb) or placebo. 1 Two hours after administration, subjects were reassessed using the same battery of neuropsychological tests, and the results were compared with baseline scores.

None of the tests showed significant changes as a result of brahmi administration. These results suggest that a single dose of brahmi extract, at the dose used in this study, does not affect cognitive function in healthy subjects.

In contrast to the acute study, the study investigating chronic brahmi administration found significant effects. 2 In this study, which was also double-blind and placebo-controlled in design, 46 healthy subjects were randomised to take either brahmi (300 mg extract daily) or placebo for a period of twelve weeks. This study used the same brahmi extract as the acute study. Subjects

underwent neuropsychological testing at baseline and again 5 and 12 weeks after the commencement of treatment.

The results showed that the administration of the brahmi extract over a twelve-week period significantly improved the speed of visual information processing, learning rate and memory consolidation, and state of anxiety, compared with placebo. The effects of brahmi on cognitive function were statistically significant after 12 weeks of supplementation, but not after 5 weeks.

While the findings of this study lend support to brahmi's reputation as a 'brain herb', it is also interesting to note the significant anxiolytic effects of the herb seen in this study. These observations confirm observations in a previous study, which found that brahmi reduced anxiety levels in patients with anxiety neurosis.

The effects seen in the neuropsychological tests suggest that brahmi may affect cognitive function by modulation of the cholinergic system.

References:

1. Nathan PJ, Clarke J, Lloyd J, Hutchison CW, Downey L, Stough C. The acute effects of an extract of *Bacopa monniera* (Brahmi) on cognitive function in healthy normal subjects. *Human Psychopharmacology* 2001; 16: 345-351.

2. Stough C, Lloyd J, Clarke J, et al. The chronic effects of an extract of *Bacopa monniera* (Brahmi) on cognitive function in healthy human subjects.

Psychopharmacology 2001 (Published online 8.6.2001 : www.netresources.com.au/health/brahmi.pdf)

