

# Hearing turns over a new leaf

FAILING hearing can be revived dramatically by an extract of leaves from the prehistoric ginkgo tree. The extract can also banish ringing in the ears.

Dr Fritz-Heinz Sprenger of Wurzburg in Germany, who has been studying the extract's effect, reported earlier this year on significant hearing improvements in 35 out of 59 patients treated with ginkgo extract, as well as the vanishing of tinnitus — ringing in the ears — in 12 out of 33 patients. The extract can also be used successfully to treat vertigo.

The ginkgo is the same today as it was more than 100m years ago, when the brontosaurus would have ripped leaves from its branches for a snack. It is thought to be the world's oldest tree, unchanged from the fossils of the Eocene.

Taken orally as either drops or tablets, its extract is ideal for people whose hearing has been damaged by loud noises near the ear, such as guns detonating suddenly beside soldiers. However the extract is not a cure for deafness, and seems to be useless for congenital complaints.



There appears to be no effect whatever on normal cells, but regeneration is triggered in damaged cells, particularly the so-called "hair cells" inside the spiral organ of the inner ear. Sprenger observed that "59% of patients showed good to very good results from treatment... 28% of the mean hearing improvement for both ears was at least 10 decibels, but one patient even improved more than 20 decibels."

Adverse side-effects are insignificant; 3% of patients treated with the drug developed upset stomachs, and fewer got headaches.

The extract is not yet registered in Britain. Under the Medicines Act of 1968, the drug is only available here when requested by a doctor from the manufacturers.

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