

NUTRACEUTICALS WORLD

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June 2003

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Nutraceuticals For The Mind

Examining the market for brain health ingredients.

THE BRAIN HEALTH MARKET

By
Tim Wright
Associate Editor

Herbs & Botanicals

Vinpocetine. Vinpocetine has only begun to receive attention in the U.S. within the past few years, although outside the U.S., particularly in Europe, it has been used for several years in connection with brain health. Vinpocetine is derived from vincamine of the lesser periwinkle (*Vinca minor* L). Since its approval as a dietary supplement by the FDA in July 1999, vinpocetine has been gaining in popularity.

As a vasodilator, vinpocetine is a substance that increases blood flow to the brain. According to Denise Lam, manager, technical services, Cyvex Nutrition, Irvine, CA, vasodilation is achieved by improving the rheological properties of blood through inhibition of platelet aggregation and by increasing the deformability of red blood cells. "Blood viscosity and resistance of blood flow in cerebral vessels are reduced, allowing the circulation of more oxygen to brain cells, thereby promoting lucidity and mental alertness/acuity," she said. "Vinpocetine also inhibits phosphodiesterase, the enzyme that breaks down ATP to ADP and AMP. Since ATP is the energy that fuels biochemical reactions, inhibiting phosphodiesterase increases ATP levels in cells, which means an increase in energy available to neurons. Increased metabolism in neurons is indicated by increased glucose metabolism in the brain brought on by increased blood flow due to vinpocetine."

The actions of vinpocetine are both preventative and specific, according to Robin Ward, sales and marketing manager, Linnea, Locarno, Switzerland. "Its reported anti-aeschemic activity, enhancement of blood flow and cerebral circulation are positives for maintenance of overall brain health," he said. "An increase in the rate of ATP synthesis and consumption of cerebral glucose would be considered more system specific. In both cases, the actions of vinpocetine may help in the management of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease as both have been areas of clinical studies with vinpocetine."s

