Aloe vera ? What is it good for? [1]

Alice,

Have you any information on the medicinal plant aloe vera?

?Desert plants

Answer

Dear Desert plants,

It's true; aloe vera is a succulent, a plant that stores water in its fleshy leaves and thus thrives in arid climates like deserts. Its use as a medicinal plant that soothes various external and internal woes, dates back thousands of years. Currently, there's some evidence for many of the ailments aloe has been used to treat for centuries. And though its use (in some forms) is generally considered to be safe, it may not be appropriate for everyone.

There is some evidence that aloe may be effective as:

- **A treatment for psoriasis.** Cream containing 0.5 percent aloe used over a period of four weeks has been shown to reduce the skin plaques commonly associated with psoriasis.
- **A laxative.** Aloe and aloe latex, derived from the plant cells underneath the leaf skin, may be taken to reduce constipation. However, continued use of aloe latex may reduce potassium levels in the intestine and possibly result in intestinal paralysis (which actually makes a bowel movement more difficult!). As such, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required the reformulation of some laxatives in order to remove aloe latex as an ingredient in 2002.

More evidence is needed to determine the effectiveness for these conditions:

- **Skin burns and frostbite.** Some evidence suggests aloe may aid in the treatment of mild to moderate skin burns and frostbite.
- **Colon ulcers.** Aloe may work better than a placebo in treating colitis.
- **Cold sores.** Aloe extract cream applied several times a day to active cold sores may expedite their healing time.
- **Wound healing.** Though there is some evidence that suggests aloe gel may increase blood circulation in the wound thereby reducing cell death, study results are mixed. Some research has shown that topical ointments containing aloe may help heal wounds (e.g. hemorrhoid wounds) while other studies have shown it can potentially worsen
some types of skin wounds (e.g. surgical wounds).

- **Diabetes.** There isn?t a consensus on aloe vera?s ability to reduce blood sugar levels. A few studies noted a blood sugar reduction in women with type 2 diabetes who ingested aloe vera gel; however, another study did not have the same findings.

Before you run out to the greenhouse to pick up a plant or to the store to buy supplements, consider this: aloe gel seems to be relatively safe for the masses, however, some aloe products may not be recommended for everyone. Taking too much aloe latex or taking it for an extended period of time may result in diarrhea, kidney problems, blood in urine, low potassium, muscle weakness, weight loss, heart disturbances, and in some cases, even death. Pregnant women may also want to steer clear of using aloe (either gel or latex), due to possible risk of birth defects. Children under the age of twelve may experience gastrointestinal upset if aloe is ingested orally. Because aloe has been shown to have an effect on blood sugar, those who have diabetes or are undergoing surgery may need to closely monitor blood sugar levels or cease use prior to the scheduled procedure. Conditions such as ulcerative colitis, Crohn?s disease, hemorrhoids, and kidney problems also may be aggravated by aloe latex use so, its use in those who suffer from these conditions is not recommended. There are also several types of medications and supplements that interact with aloe vera. All this to say, if you have any of the above conditions, it?s best to speak with your health care provider before using aloe vera products.

Simply having an aloe plant around can be enjoyable, even if you never harness it for its medicinal properties. In addition to their sassy, spiky look, they are easy to maintain, as long as you don't over water these dry soil-loving plants.

Here?s to hoping you?ve found an oasis of knowledge regarding this dry-climate plant,

Alice!

Category:
- General Health [2]
- Skin Conditions [3]
- Miscellaneous [4]

**Related questions**

- Dry skin? [5]
- Peeling skin after using a tanning bed [6]
- Are epsom salts a safe laxative? [7]
- Diabetes mellitus [8]
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- Sunburn cures? [10]

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