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Aloe Vera – History Use and Benefits

By Samantha Munro

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Often called the 'miracle plant' or the 'natural healer', Aloe Vera is a plant of many surprises. It flourishes in warm and dry climates, and to many people it looks like a cactus with fleshy thorny leaves. In fact it is a member of the Lily family, staying moist where other plants wither and die by closing its pores to prevent moisture loss.

There are around 400 species of Aloe, but it is the Aloe Barbadensis Miller (Aloe Vera or "true aloe") plant which has been of most use to mankind because of the medicinal properties it displays. Ancient records show that the benefits of Aloe Vera have been known for centuries, with its therapeutic advantages and healing properties surviving for over 4000 years. The earliest record of Aloe Vera is on a Sumerian tablet dating from 2100 BC.

Its antiquity was first discovered in 1862 in an Egyptian papyrus dated 1550 BC. It was used to great effect by Greek and Roman physicians. Researchers have found that both the ancient Chinese and Indian used Aloe Vera. Egyptian Queens associated its use with their physical beauty, while in the Phillipines it is used with milk for kidney infections. Aloes are referred to in the Bible, and legend suggests that Alexander the Great conquered the island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean to secure supplies of Aloes to treat the battle wounds of his soldiers.

Aloe Vera remained a prominent herbal remedy but as the Northern European countries expanded their colonisation of the globe, Aloe Vera starts to fall from grace. It is not clear why this was so, but a possible explanation is the difference between the use of Aloe Vera in tropical climes, compared with the temperate north. In tropical countries where Aloe grew naturally, there was an abundance of fresh Aloe. However, Aloe Vera had to be imported to the temperate north, but inevitably degraded in transit. Physicians in Europe therefore never got to experience the true benefits, and scorned reports of the wonders that Aloe Vera could do for health. In consequence Aloe Vera never really "took hold" in the knowledge of European Physicians, and the "remarkable healing powers" were felt to be more myth than fact. As science developed Aloe Vera became discarded along with many stalwart herbal remedies of an earlier age considered to be "folk remedies", not worthy of scientific examination.

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Aloe Vera remained popular however in tropical areas, and after the end of World War II interest was refreshed in Aloe Vera but the main obstacle to it being used outside tropical areas was the need to prevent the gel deteriorating. Many attempts were made, but failed as excessive heat destroys the essence of Aloe Vera, and higher than acceptable contents of Aloin remained which is a potent laxative. Indeed it was the laxative powers of the un-pure Aloe Vera gel that helped Aloe Vera maintain a toehold in Western medical science.

Although there are many Aloe's the term Aloe Vera ("true Aloe") refers to the Aloe Barbadensis Miller. Fully grown the plant stands 60 to 90 cm high, and a mature leaf is 7 to 10 cm across at the base, weighing 1.5 to 2 kg.

The Aloe leaf structure is made up of four layers:

§Rind – the outer protective layer;

§Sap – a layer of bitter fluid which helps protect the plant from animals;

§Mucilage

§Gel – the inner part of the leaf that is filleted out to make Aloe Vera gel.

Aloe Vera (inner gel) contains:

§The 8 essential Amino Acids that the human body needs but cannot manufacture. There are 20 "critical" Amino Acids in human metabolism, but the body can only make 12, the other 8 have to be obtained from food. These are: Isoleucine, Leucine, Lysine, Methionine, Phenylalanine, Threonine, Valine, and Tryptophan. All these are contained in Aloe Vera;

§Enzymes – Amylase, Bradykinase, Catalase, Cellulase, Lipase, Oxidase, Alkaline Phosphatase, Proteolytiase, Creatine Phosphokinase, Carboxypeptidase. Most of these are beneficial to human metabolism;

§Lignin – gives Aloe Vera its penetrating powers, but is not considered to have any other benefit;

§Minerals – Calcium, Chromium, Copper, Iron, Magnesium, Manganese, Potassium, Phosphorous, Sodium, and Zinc. We do not need to be told how the western diet is mineral deficient mainly due to intensive farming on mineral depleted soils. Many bodily functions depend on minerals to work properly, and some minerals are critical to the metabolism of vitamins;

§Mono- and Poly-Saccharides – The mono-saccharides are the familiar glucose, and fructose that we know as sugars. The more complex long-chain sugars are the poly-saccharides which are thought to give Aloe Vera its unique healing and immuno-stimulating properties;

§Salicylic Acid – a substance similar to aspirin that can help reduce fever and inflammation;

§Saponins – natural soapy substances that have both cleansing and antiseptic properties;

§Sterols – naturally occurring plant steroids with analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and antiseptic properties.

§Vitamins – these include A (beta-carotene and retinol), B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B6 (pyridoxine), B12 (cyanocobalamin), C (ascorbic acid), E (tocopherol) and Folic Acid.

Aloe Vera is often claimed to be the "miracle plant" and it can be difficult to filter out the truth from the hype. It is well established that Aloe Vera has some remarkable properties, many of which are being subjected to medical and scientific scrutiny.

The most famous property is for use on burns, and Aloe Vera used to be known as the 'burn plant'. It is

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no longer necessary to keep an Aloe Vera plant handy for when you catch your hand on the oven door, these days Aloe Vera Gel comes in handy tubes.

A two year trial is underway at the Neath, Morriston and Singleton hospitals in Swansea for use of Aloe Vera in treating Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). A clinical trial involving 44 patients suffering from Ulcerative Colitis has been completed at the Royal London Hospital and the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. The trial was completed in January 2004 and an improvement found in 38% of Patients given Aloe Vera gel as opposed to 8% given a placebo.

Others have reported benefits of Aloe Vera in treating Eczema and Psoriasis, and a product called Aloe Propolis Crème is favoured by many for these conditions.

Aloe Vera is not however a substitute for medical treatment or therapy, and should be discussed with your Doctor or Health Professional if you are already receiving treatment.

Aloe Vera has a bitter taste which can be unpleasant in the raw state. It is possible to get used to the taste of plain Aloe Vera gel, but if you can't the addition of some fruit juice helps to make it more

palatable.

Many preparations are available that purport to provide Aloe Vera in tablet or capsule form. It is unlikely that many of the delicate beneficial components will have survived the manufacturing process, and these products often contain so little Aloe Vera as to be of dubious benefit. A study 10 years ago found that less than 1% of Aloe Vera preparations contained acceptable quantities of Aloe Vera Gel. One product achieved notoriety for actually having no measurable Aloe Vera content.

There is much confusion between Aloe Vera Gel and Aloe Vera Juice with the two often being thought synonymous. The term Gel refers to the inner leaf only, whereas Juice refers to "Aloe Latex" a bitter substance found just under the skin of the leaf.

Leading authorities on Aloe Vera maintain that only Aloe Vera gel as fresh as preservation allows from the inner leaf has any remarkable properties.

Some products are made from re-constituted freeze dried Aloe Vera. It seems unlikely that all of its beneficial components will have survived freeze drying, and it is of course possible for the less scrupulous to add more water back than was taken out to make it go further. Natural Aloe Vera Gel should be cloudy with fragments of pulp in it. If the product is crystal clear then carbon filtration has probably been used which can filter out much of what is good.

Another argument that rages on is the difference of opinion between those promoting so-called "whole leaf" Aloe Vera and those who only use the inner gel. It is well established that the inner gel contains most of the beneficial parts of the plant and little of the less beneficial. Those who promote products based on the inner gel alone maintain that their product is as close to "straight from the plant" as the preservation process allows.

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The promoters of "whole leaf" Aloe Vera maintain that as they use all the leaf, their product must be more abundant in the good properties of Aloe Vera. However, the components most likely to destroy the poly-saccharides (thought to give Aloe Vera its renowned properties) – cellulose and bacteria are present in Aloe Vera leaves just under the rind or on the surface of the leaf. Certainly "whole leaf" manufacturers use carbon filtration or other techniques to filter out the impurities in the liquidised whole leaf and these are thought to also filter out many of the beneficial constituents.

With so much variation in the market, maintaining the quality of Aloe Vera is key to retaining Consumer confidence. There are four key tests of Quality:

- §The Official IASC (International Aloe Science Council) seal on the package or product container;
- §That Stabilised Aloe Vera gel is listed as the FIRST ingredient on the contents list, and beware of products that state "aqua" (Water) as the first ingredient as this almost certainly means that the contents is re-constituted powder;
- §That the gel is sold in a sealed container that preserves the integrity of the contents;
- §That the product has at least a 30 day satisfaction guarantee.

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Samantha runs a business supplying skin care, health and beauty products based on Aloe Vera. To

visit her web site go to <http://www.aloehealthuk.com>

Aloe Vera Remedies

By Patrick Carlow

Aloe Vera has proven to be very effective in healing skin problems such as minor burns, and scratches. But unknown to many, it has been recently discovered that it is very useful in oral care as well.

Aloe Vera aids in the healing of gum problems. Gum diseases like gingivitis or periodontitis can be treated easily with this herb. Gingivitis caused by bacteria building up between the teeth and gums that cause inflammation and bleeding. It has been proven that Aloe Vera greatly reduces the instances of gum bleeding. With its soothing and healing properties, gums tend to stop the restored to health faster.

Periodontitis is the advanced case of gingivitis. Tooth loss apparent if you have periodontitis. Aloe Vera reduces the swelling of the gums, and the soft tissues in it. Once swelling is reduced, bleeding stops.

Aloe Vera is also known to have antifungal benefits. It prevents denture stomatitis, which is the redness and soreness of the mucous membranes covered permanently by a denture. Not only the teeth but also the mouth is a subject of fungal infections. The cracked corners of the mouths are prone to fungus. With the application of Aloe Vera, fungal growth is prevented.

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Aloe Vera also promotes the healing of tooth cavities when placed inside extraction sockets. The gums are almost like the skin, only tenderer. Just like the way aloe helps in treating a wound, it also would in gum abrasions.

Another application would be in root canals as sedative dressing and as file lubricant. The nerve ends in a root canal are very sensitive. Aloe Vera greatly helps to lessen its sensitivity.

Aside from these applications, Aloe Vera is added to toothpaste. It is known to be a whitening agent for the teeth. It is also rich in Vitamin K and provides natural protection for those susceptible teeth and gums.

Dentists and doctors alike have come up with an Aloe Vera activator spray, which is good for certain throat infections. This herb has the capacity to prevent not only fungal but viral infections as well. The same spray is also being used to ease the painful growth of a wisdom tooth and the joint pains that is associated with it.

Aloe Vera is not only for topical applications. It can be drunk or ingested. Several pills and juice drinks are being manufactured as dental medicines to promote the healing of dental surgery patients and other similar instances.

Aloe Vera has found its way through dentistry and soon enough, all other fields will be able to find uses for it in more ways than one. Researchers have been working overtime to fully maximize the healing benefits of Aloe Vera. This herb has been tagged as nature's well-kept secret because its abundance of application has yet to be discovered.

We all should benefit from an Aloe Vera. It's an all around wonder for the body. It pampers the skin, the hair, and now, the teeth. Aloe Vera has to be enthroned, as nature's most valuable gift to man as well.

Patrick Carlow is a publisher of several Internet web sites and articles and has been conducting business online for over ten years. He is the owner and publisher of Aloe Vera Natural Skin Care.



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