

A QUESTION OF HEALTH: I can't seem to get rid of the infection that is giving me a terrible cough. And how can I produce my own aloe vera juice at home?(Features)



The Independent (London, England); 8/16/2005; Kavalier, Fred

BUG THAT WON'T GO AWAY

I am being treated for the third time in four years for *Helicobacter pylori*. One of the main symptoms for me has been a severe, dry, tickly cough. Why does it keep returning and how is it caught? I have been taking esomeprazole for the past two years to treat gastric reflux. Could this have anything to do with it?

Helicobacter pylori (the name is usually shortened to *H pylori*) is a bacterium that lives in the mucus that lines the wall of the stomach. Although it was discovered about 20 years ago, it has been causing stomach problems for human beings for much longer. Many millions of people carry *H pylori* in their stomachs, but only a relatively small proportion of them ever get any symptoms. *H pylori* infection is an important cause of ulcers. For many years, ulcers were linked to bad diets, stress and all sorts of other factors. But is now clear that *H pylori* is more important than any of these other things. There is a great debate about whether *H pylori* can also cause indigestion, heartburn and other stomach symptoms. If you have been given the correct treatment for *H pylori* (usually a cocktail of three drugs taken over a week or two), it is pretty unlikely that the infection will come back. The best way to see if you still have the infection is called the breath test. This shows whether or not the bacterium is present in the stomach. Blood tests are not accurate enough to determine if it has been eradicated. I doubt that your problems are being caused by esomeprazole, which is a drug that reduces stomach acid. But your cough could be caused by stomach acid trickling upwards in the direction of your windpipe.

HOME-PRODUCED ALOE JUICE

I have long been a fan of aloe vera, believing it has healing properties. As I have a flourishing aloe vera plant I wondered whether it was possible to make my own juice. The shop-bought juice is very expensive. Is it safe to make from a plant, and how would I go about it?

Aloe vera belongs to the lily family. Its leaves look a bit like cactus leaves, and many people have aloe plants, but are probably unaware of it. The plant contains two substances - aloe vera gel and aloe latex. The gel comes from within the leaves, while the latex is sometimes called aloe juice. It is extracted from just below the outer skin of the leaves. The juice is yellow and bitter. When it is dried it can be turned into brown granules that have laxative properties. Aloe gel is widely used, particularly in the US, as a skin moisturiser which is supposed to have healing properties. It is easy to get aloe gel out of

one of the leaves " you simply break the leaf and the gel is there. I can't think of any reason why you shouldn't do this if you want to rub aloe on your skin. Extracting the juice would be more difficult and it would be impossible to know how much you were getting. It is a powerful laxative and an overdose would be unpleasant and possibly even dangerous.

Have your say

Readers write

FD has personal experience of a salivary duct stone:

I only discovered that I had a stone when it became heavily infected and swollen. This happened after some 15 years of on/off symptoms. At hospital I was told the same thing about the dangers of an operation, but was also told to suck lemon boiled sweets to try to expel the stone. This worked " out it came (it was the size of a grape pip). It's worth a try.