

ALOE VERA: THE HEALING PLANT

By STEVEN R. SCHECHTER, ND

The succulent leaf of the aloe vera plant is one of nature's most revered therapeutic herbs. Throughout world history, aloe vera has been widely regarded as a miraculous healing plant. Many cultures observed that aloe produced apparently magical benefits.

Historical and religious documents of the Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, Hebrews, Chinese, Asian Indians, Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Arabians report its effectiveness for both internal and external uses.

During the summer of 1967, I was hired to do research at the world's first medical laser laboratory at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati, OH. Every day, after completing my own experiments, I would go into the room where the research animals were housed to do what I could to help them heal from their laser burns.

After using several preparations, I observed that aloe vera gel produced the most impressive healing of various skin disorders, including burns, lesions, and cancers. I also had an opportunity to test the gel on myself. Each time, aloe consistently and quickly produced impressive results.

Aloe vera is well known to soothe and heal skin problems including cuts, burns, scrapes, non-poisonous bug bites and stings, rashes, and other dermatological problems when rubbed gently with the gel of the aloe. Burns start healing much faster than they would if left alone.

Penetrating Burn Remedy

Aloe is a well known burn remedy and is used in trauma centers in California, Illinois, New York, Texas and other states. One of the reasons that aloe has such a wide range of beneficial effects is that even when being rubbed gently onto the skin's surface, aloe has an amazing ability to penetrate the skin.

Research conducted by Dr. Ivan

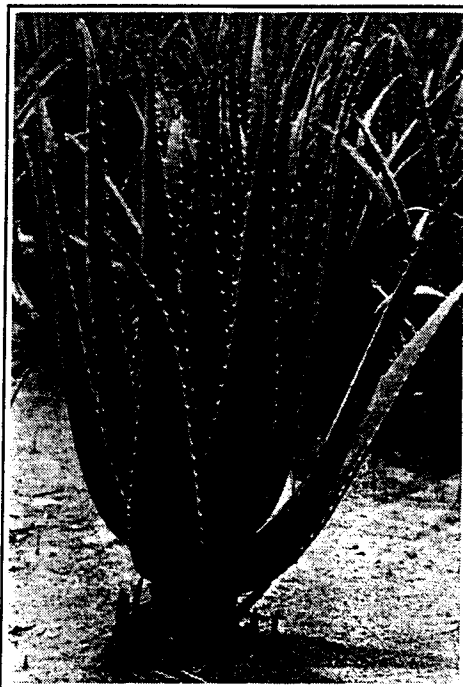


Photo courtesy of Carrington Labs, Dallas, TX

E. Danhof, Ph.D., MD, retired professor of physiology at the University of Texas, showed that aloe vera gel penetrates through human skin almost four times faster than water. Because aloe is a super penetrator, it is added to moisturizers, shampoos, and aftershave creams.

Aloe vera gel normally will average about 99.52 percent water and only 0.48 percent active ingredients. The whole leaf contains a higher percentage of active ingredients. One or more of these 0.48 percent ingredients makes aloe reach far into the underlying layers of skin.

Dr. Danhof and other researchers have observed that when aloe is combined with other healing substances, aloe has the ability to help these substances penetrate more easily and deeply into the skin. A number of cosmetic companies now combine aloe with other natural remedies beneficial to the skin for prevention and self treatment.

Aloe vs. Retin-A

Research shows that aloe produces an anti-aging effect on the skin as strong as retinoic acid and yet, unlike retinoic acid, the polysaccharides in aloe vera are not irritating to the skin.

Aloe vera has an anti-inflammatory and immune strengthening effect upon the skin. Aloe contains ingredients that neutralize foreign harmful substances within the skin and then helps your blood cells remove these pathogens before they can spread.

Aloe contains two ingredients: an enzyme called bradykinase and salicylic acid which relieve pain and soothe the skin. Salicylic acid is the active pain-relieving ingredient in aspirin. These anti-inflammatory substances make aloe effective in treating acne and other irritations to the skin.

Aloe's Many Benefits

Aloe is also used in deodorants to reduce perspiration, help neutralize odor-causing bacteria, and keep skin dry.

Aloe also has many other uses, including as a skin-tightening astringent, complexion rejuvenator and hair strengthener. Medicinally, it can be used to treat sunburns and other burns, blisters, abrasions, diaper rash, arthritis and hemorrhoidal itching and pain. Internally, it stimulates healthy cell renewal without increasing the risk of cancer and increases the manufacture of skin supporting protein called "collagen."

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It also helps skin derma increase production of human fibroblasts six to eight times faster than usual, thus helping to prevent and reduce wrinkling and aging of skin.

From traditional herbal medicine, aloe is also reported useful for the following symptoms: fevers, skin diseases, constipation, menstrual suppression, gonorrhea, jaundice, rheumatism, retention of urine, indigestion, flatulence, abdominal tumors, carbuncles, muscle spasms during menstruation, ulcers, colitis, inflammations, vaginitis and cervicitis (used as a douche), conjunctivitis, and for enlargement or inflammation of the liver, spleen and other glands.

Aloe's Active Ingredients

In 1982, Carrington Laboratories in Dallas, TX, successfully extracted and stabilized the active ingredient in the aloe vera plant which led to the granting of many subsequent patents. The compound extracted and stabilized was the polysaccharide, acemannan.

Acemannan is found in the sap just beneath the outer surface of the leaf rind.

Processing aloe into a standardized extract of acemannan removes the irritant, aloin, and leaves a standardized extract that is now well-documented to produce many therapeutic benefits in your body. Research indicates that acemannan possesses many of the healing properties attributed to aloe vera.

Acemannan Shows Promise

Acemannan is available as a hydrogel called Carrasyn for wound and skincare. As an injectable, acemannan has received conditional approval from USDA as an aid in the treatment of canine and feline fibrosarcoma (cancer in underlying tissue such as muscle, bone and connective tissue).

Fibrosarcoma results indicate significant tumor shrinkage and/or necrosis of the tumor with a survival

rate of over 75%. Acemannan has been approved by the USDA to be available to veterinarians as an immuno-stimulant and vaccine adjuvant.

Acemannan has been well documented to enhance your immune system rather than overriding it. Acemannan stimulates production of macrophages, interferon, lymphocytes, phagocytic white blood cells, prostaglandin E2 (PGE 2), and cytokines - all important components of your immune response.

Acemannan has also been shown to produce anti-viral and anti-fungal activity. Research indicates that acemannan shows therapeutic possibilities in a wide range of human and animal diseases including cancer, AIDS, and other immune disorders. It is well-documented to be non-toxic and very stable.

Acemannan has been documented to be beneficial in the treatment of cancer, viral diseases, respiratory, and immune-regulatory diseases, inflammations, infections and infestations. In vitro studies using human blood cells demonstrated acemannan stimulates the release of interleukin 1, interleukin 2, interleukin 6, tumor necrosis factors and produces other anti-tumor activity.

Acemannan may prove beneficial for allergic rhinitis (hayfever, which affects some 20 million Americans), oral ulcers, and herpes labialis. Oral ulcers or canker sores afflict about 20 percent of the general US population. Herpes labialis, also known as fever blisters or cold sores, occurs in approximately 20-30% of the population.

For Radiation Reactions

Since the earliest use of X-rays, and subsequently radiotherapy, doctors have observed that radiation can cause severe skin reactions. Numerous research studies document the effectiveness of aloe in preventing or treating reactions to radiation.

For example, emulsions of juices

from aloe were applied externally after radiation treatment to 260 human patients. Researchers claimed that the emulsions were far more therapeutic than most synthetic preparations in reducing skin reactions due to irradiation.

They said aloe emulsions were "recommended for preventing the development of local reactions in radiation therapy, in the treatment of dry and moist epidermitis (inflammation of the outer layers of the skin) and treating radiation burns of the second and third degrees."

Aloe was also found to accelerate the process of tissue repair and normal cell growth, and to be helpful in treating many other dermatological problems.

Aloe and acemannan act similarly to vitamin A/beta-carotene by aiding the growth and repair of body tissues. They help maintain smooth, soft, disease-free skin. Internally, aloe, acemannan, and vitamin A/beta-carotene give strength to cell walls and help protect the mucous membranes, while reducing susceptibility to infection. Both act as antioxidants and combat the effects of air-borne chemical pollutants and radiation.

A Word Of Caution

There are, however, a few cautions regarding the internal use of aloe vera gel or juice. Pregnant women should not ingest aloe vera since it acts to contract the smooth muscles, including those of the uterus. Also, diabetics should consult their physician before taking aloe vera, since there is the possibility that it may stimulate the pancreas to produce more insulin.

Aloe vera is not a panacea, nor is it a cure for most medical ailments as some people have promoted it to be. However, used properly for the disorders it is known to affect, aloe vera is a powerful healer that has been successfully employed for millennia. □