

# The prickly guardian of good health; Inside Out.(Features)



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Byline: Eileen Taylor

ALEXANDER the Great carried it into battle on his wagons so he would have fresh supplies during his military campaign. Ancient Chinese doctors considered it to be one of the plants with major therapeutic properties and American Indians took it for a number of internal disorders.

Today the words aloe vera are part of the language and products from this cactus plant have been acclaimed for their healing and health-giving properties. Former library worker Domitila Paz-Riley, for example, has no doubt about the benefits of taking aloe vera gel.

After undergoing an hysterectomy in 1994, she was given HRT to counteract the fact that she no longer had any ovaries and might therefore be oestrogen deficient. But, as Domitila explains, she could not find HRT to suit her. Although she continued to take it until September 1999, her health began to deteriorate.

"Before that I had been a very healthy person. But soon I developed so many things wrong with me including polyarthritis skin disorder and became very depressed. I had had a good job working for the public libraries in Liverpool but had to retire on health grounds.

While I was on HRT my weight soared from nine-and-a-half stone to 15 stone.

Although I was offered different types of HRT I could not find one to suit me and I was in despair and very depressed until a friend told me about a workmate who had been singing the praises of aloe vera and saying how much it helped her with menopause symptoms.

"I got some literature about it and bought some aloe vera gel which cleanses the body and some aloe vera tablets. Within three weeks I could feel the difference. I was becoming stress-free and my brain was more active. I stopped taking the HRT and have never used it since. The rheumatoid arthritis and my painful joints have virtually disappeared and I lead a much more active life and don't feel any pain."

Domitila of Aintree, Liverpool, joins an army of fans for products made from aloe vera, a succulent plant which flourishes in dry warm climates and is a member of the lily family.

Claims for its benefits have been around for centuries in widely separate parts of the world.

The Americans, for example, have called it "the Silent Healer" while the Russians call it the "Elixir of Longevity".

In modern times it is being used increasingly for a wide range of conditions from skin disorders to irritable bowel syndrome. It is said to boost the immune system, contain antiseptic agents, detoxify the body, act as an anti-inflammatory agent and accelerate healing. The gel is currently being used in the treatment of sports injuries. It has no known side effects either. But how can one plant be of benefit for so many varying conditions?

RESEARCH has shown that aloe vera leaves contain a thick clear gel which is a natural source of many vital nutrients. In fact there are said to be over 70 substances which meet the body's needs in maintaining health and vitality, including vitamins, amino acids and enzymes. Aloe vera is a particularly rich source of B vitamins and of minerals including calcium, zinc, chromium, potassium, magnesium and copper.