

# Health & Life: Dear Doctor; .

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QI have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and have been told to try aloe vera, but someone said it can cause loose bowels. Is this true? Are there other side-effects? P O Aston

A Aloe vera gel is often helpful for IBS as it contains soapy substances (saponins) that cleanse the bowel, pulpy microfibrils (lignins) that absorb fluid and toxins and bulk up the motions and it also has a soothing action.

Many pure aloe drinks contain a substance called aloin. Aloin has a powerful laxative action which can, of course, be beneficial and usually works within eight to 12 hours.

Not everyone using Aloe wants this effect, however, and therefore select products that are labelled as aloin-free. Some of these products are being investigated by Trading Standards officers, however.

Best advice is to start off with a small dose (eg 15ml to 30ml) and to slowly increase this, if necessary, depending on how you respond.

Aloe vera should not be consumed during pregnancy (there is a possible increased risk of miscarriage) or when breast-feeding.