

TWIN TREATS; NATURAL HEALING POWERS OF ALOE VERA MAKE IT A SUPER PLANT IF YOU WANT TO FEEL FINE.(Vital)



Daily Record (Glasgow, Scotland); 2/6/2002

Byline: CHARLOTTE MORTENSSON & ALLAN HALL

Aloe vera

WHICH famous plant is found in almost every beauty product you can lay your hands on?

From shampoos to sunscreens to moisturisers, at least one item in each range boasts it contains aloe vera. There are even aloe vera toothpastes.

The over-exposure might leave you wondering if it's all just a marketing ploy, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest this really is a superplant.

It has been shown to ease a wide range of problems, mostly connected to the skin and the digestion.

We certainly aren't the first society to slap it on. There are records of Alexander the Great's armies taking it into battle with them to help treat wounds. Its medicinal and cosmetic use go back to Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, China and India.

The first scientific research into aloe vera started in the Thirties during the early days of x-rays. It wasn't unusual for patients to accidentally end up with radiation burns and hospitals found the skin healed at least 10 per cent more quickly when aloe vera was applied.

MAGICAL JUICES

JUDGING by the pictures of spiky green plants you see on aloe vera products, you'd be forgiven for thinking it's a cactus.

In fact, it's part of the lily family. It grows in warm climates and the goodness comes from the shiny, slimy pulp inside, as well as the thicker internal layer surrounding it.

There are about 200 different types, but the one used most widely is *Barbadensis*.

Around 95 per cent of aloe vera is water, but the rest is a healthy cocktail of antiseptic, anti-inflammatory and nutritious substances.

Some of these ingredients need no explanation. Vitamins A, C and E are anti-oxident, fighting premature ageing, but there are also less familiar ingredients. They include:

Salicylic acid - an antiseptic and painkiller which also softens the skin

Saponins - which are antiseptic and anti-inflammatory

Enzymes - naturally present in the digestive system and many of the body's tissues, their functions include breaking down food

Anthraquinones - these fight fungi, bacteria and viruses, reduce pain and swelling and also stimulate the bowel

Lignin - a glutinous substance which is easily absorbed by the skin. It is thought that lignin helps the beneficial compounds to penetrate deeply into the skin.

JUICE OR GEL

ANYONE who's been in South America, the Far East or the West Indies will have been offered an aloe vera treatment by someone on the beach using the fresh leaf.

This isn't just a con for tourists - local people use it all the time for spots, rashes, cuts and burns.

Indulge yourself if you get the chance - when it's fresh, it's most full of goodness. The next best thing is a high- quality product from a health food store or pharmacy, as close to 100 per cent pure as possible.

There are several brands available on the Internet - Forever Living Products are excellent - but watch out for what are described as "business opportunities" when you order, as these are sometimes `pyramid' selling schemes which should be steered clear of.

Standard beauty products won't do the trick. A moisturiser or shampoo can legally state it contains aloe vera, but it might only be one or two per cent. Have a look at the label. If it's the main ingredient, it will be listed first. The further down the list it is, the less the product contains. It's fine to use, but won't give the same results.

Aloe vera is available as a gel to use externally, as a liquid to drink, or as capsules. The drink is bitter, but there are flavoured versions available - Holland & Barrett Cranberry Flavour is very tasty, or you can dilute it into a soft drink yourself.

HELP'S AT HAND

ALOE VERA has a very wide range of applications.

Research by the Department of Physiology, University of Texas Health Science Center, even shows that rats which were fed aloe vera had a 10 per cent longer lifespan than those who didn't.

We've listed some of the more common problems it is known to help. Like any alternative or traditional medicine, it won't work for everyone, but there are no side-effects, so it's well worth a try.

Aloe vera is not a substitute for medical attention, so see a doctor for worrying or persistent problems.

It should not be taken internally by pregnant or breast-feeding mums or children. Each body is different, so adjust the dosage after a few days if you think you need more or less.

ACNE AND ACNE ROSACEA

WORKS on these problems by soothing inflammation, fighting infection, dissolving dead skin and digesting any pus.

Apply gel in the morning and regularly through the day. Skin should feel cooler on first application and overall improvement noticed within a week. The drink will help reduce inflammation. Take one tablespoon two or three times a day.

Dry, lined skin

WORKS by stimulating cells to replicate themselves faster. Apply gel through the day as needed. If you prefer to wear your usual day cream, use aloe vera only at night. Skin should feel better immediately and look fresher after three to four weeks.

Arthritis

ALOE VERA contains natural anti-inflammatories and pain killers. It also stimulates liver and kidneys, which is thought to help arthritis. Any signs of improvement will be gradual, so you monitor yourself for at least a month. Take two tablespoons on an empty stomach, morning and night. Gel can be rubbed into the joints.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome,

Wind, Constipation

WORKS well by reducing excess acidity, improving digestion and reducing any yeast infection. Take one tablespoon two or three times a day.

Long-term tiredness

THIS can be caused by poor nutrition or the body's inability to digest food well. Aloe vera improves digestion, which means more energy.

Cuts and burns

IF serious, these must be attended to immediately by trained medical staff. Otherwise, clean wound under running water and cover with sterilised dressing. Apply aloe vera one