

THE POTTED PHYSICIAN; BODYFOODS by Britain's leading nutrition expert.

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Aloe vera has long been regarded as a plant with extraordinary healing powers. The ancient Egyptians called aloe vera, a native of Africa, the 'plant of immortality', and it earned its reputation among Western herbalists as 'the potted physician' many centuries ago. More recently research has verified that the clear, bitter gel contained within aloe vera's dagger-shaped leaves does indeed have healing properties, including nutritional benefits. In my opinion, it's one of the best first-aid home remedies, which is why I make sure that my fridge is always stocked with both aloe vera juice and gel.

Aloe vera gel has anaesthetic, antibacterial and antifungal properties, which means that it relieves pain, itching and swelling when applied to minor wounds, as well as increasing the blood flow to the damaged areas and encouraging the fibroblasts, or healing skin cells, to get to work. Use it on scuffed knees and the rashes caused by German measles and chickenpox (I consider it more effective than calamine lotion, which, when I had chickenpox, merely dried my spots and made them itchier).

Many eczema sufferers also find that it calms inflamed sores. And if you're pregnant, try rubbing your breasts and bump with aloe vera gel every day, and you may just find that you're spared stretchmarks.

A study published in the Journal of the Medical Association of Thailand reported that aloe vera gel speeds up the healing process when applied to moderate burns, and because it has been shown to soothe radiation burns, I recommend it to people who are undergoing radiotherapy.

According to research reported in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, aloe vera juice gives good results when used in the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel disease.

This conclusion was reached after ten patients were given three 2oz doses daily of aloe vera juice for seven days. At the end of the week, none had diarrhoea, four passed stools more regularly and three felt more energetic.

Other studies have shown that aloe vera juice has the power to detoxify the bowel, neutralise stomach acidity, promote the healing of gastric ulcers and, due to its laxative effect, relieve constipation.

Hormone Research reports that when five patients with non-insulin-dependent (type 2)

diabetes were given half a teaspoon of a juice made from aloe vera extract every day for up to 14 weeks, their blood-sugar levels were lowered by an average of 45 per cent, even though their weight remained the same.

A survey carried out among 673 patients with lung cancer over a five-year period in Okinawa, Japan, focused on the link between smoking, plant foods within the diet and the incidence of lung cancer. In *The Japanese Journal of Cancer Research*, the researchers concluded, 'The results of plant epidemiology suggests that aloe vera juice prevents human pulmonary carcinogenesis', going on to state that aloe vera is 'widely preventive or suppressive against various human cancers', not just lung cancer.