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Aloe vera cuts ulcer risk



Aloe vera is a well-known painkiller

A gel made from the herb aloe vera may help to treat and prevent stomach and intestinal ulcers.

A team from the Barts and London, Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Dentistry have carried out tests which show that the herb has a beneficial effect on the production of substances which help boost the healing process in cases of ulceration in the gut.

The researchers believe aloe vera could be particularly valuable in treating ulcers caused as a side effect of taking anti-inflammatory NSAID drugs.

The aloe vera gel was tested on a culture of gastric cells at a concentration that is likely to be found in the stomach after swallowing a dose.

Aloe has been recognised as a painkiller, and since ancient times it has been used to treat burns.

It has also been used to treat other skin conditions such as scrapes, sunburns and insect bites.

Aloe is also a common ingredient in cosmetics and lotions because it naturally balances the pH of the skin.

Internally, it has been used as a mild laxative. There is also some evidence to suggest that it might enhance the functioning of the immune system.

Irritable bowels

Researchers at Morriston Hospital, Swansea, are conducting trials to establish whether aloe vera is an effective treatment for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Gastroenterologist Professor John Williams told BBC News Online: "IBS the most common condition we see and the most difficult to treat.

"It is entirely benign, but extremely troublesome for people who have it.

"We have some anecdotal evidence that aloe vera may help, but we need to know if this is genuine effect, or simply linked to the fact that the condition improves and then relapses."

Results on the IBS trial, in which approximately 250 people will take part, will not be known for two years.

The research was presented at a meeting of the British Society of Gastroenterology.
