

Aloe Vera – Nature’s Miracle

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For centuries the Aloe vera plant has been used by people all over the world to cure or alleviate a wide range of diseases. Two thousand years ago a Greek named Dioscorides recorded that Aloe could be used for wounds, stomach disorders and pain, constipation, headache, itching, loss of hair, mouth and gum diseases, kidney ailments, blistering, skin care, sunburn and blemishes.

Historians have written that Aristotle persuaded Alexander the Great to conquer the island Socotra, (East Africa) in order to have enough Aloe to treat the wounds of his soldiers. African Congo hunters rubbed their bodies with Aloe to reduce perspiration and human scent, enabling them to approach their prey with less chance of detection.

Other Africans hung Aloe over their dwelling entrances to ward off evil spirits. Central American Indians and Mexicans continue to use the plant as their ancestors did, for burns, blister prevention, peptic and duodenal ulcers, dysentery, longevity, sexual prowess and bladder and kidney infections. In Java, it is favored as a hair conditioner; they claim that Aloe rubbed into the scalp stimulates hair growth.

It seems impossible that the common Aloe plant – member of the lily plant – could possess such miraculous healing powers for an incredible variety of ailments. However, there is no denying that man’s use of Aloe dates back 2,300 years. Throughout this time, it was employed for its cure-all powers all over the world. Have folk remedies been passed down through the ages because of superstition, custom, or because they really work?

Can Aloe vera cure ailments ranging from arthritis to acne? Many scientists say yes. Maybe our forebears didn’t know why certain plants were medicinally effective, but when they found a plant with the properties of Aloe vera, they knew they were on to a good thing. Now, since Aloe has been ”rediscovered”, we’re on to a good thing too; from cosmetics to pulmonary tuberculosis, scientists are finding that the claims made for this miracle plant were not fanciful flights of the imagination or blind superstition but what other peoples have known for centuries – that Aloe vera really works.

There are nearly 200 species of Aloe. All of them are preceded by Aloe, which is the name of the genus of the plant, but only a few are important to medicine. The most important to man is the Aloe vera, which in Latin means “the true Aloe.” This plant’s chemistry has been investigated off and on for several decades.

Substances reported to occur in Aloe vera include polysaccharides containing glucose, galactose, xylose; it also has tannins, steroids organic acids, antibiotic substances, enzymes, trace sugars, a protein containing 18 amino acids, "wound healing hormones," growth stimulators, vitamins, chloride, sulfate, iron, calcium, copper, sodium, potassium, manganese, and more.

The healing properties of the Aloe vera pulp are believed to be partly attributable to its 96 percent water content which provides available water to the injured tissue without sealing off the air. The remaining 4 percent of the pulp contains polysaccharides (multiple sugar molecules), thought to be important to the Aloe's value as a moisturizer. Researchers in Japan studying the high molecular weight of Aloe extracts found that they contain enzymes.

One enzyme is able to break down a substance which is formed in inflammation, while another material contains a lecithin-like substance which reacts with destructive enzymes. Although scientists now know how and why Aloe affects some of its cures, they have not yet unraveled all of its mysteries.

The following paragraphs describe what researchers have so far discovered as they continue to seek answers about this miraculous plant, as well as scientifically unsubstantiated reports.

Arthritis

Many people suffering from arthritis have reported that by drinking a little Aloe vera juice each day, their pain is lessened. Science is now attempting to discover if Aloe is indeed responsible for alleviating this pain, to what extent, and in which types of arthritis. Some people experience relief right away, although the majority found that results do not take place until the second month. Most of those who report relief from arthritic symptoms say they take one or two tablespoons of the juice at a time, from two to four times a day. Aloe is also claimed to be effective for aching joints and muscles. It is said to bring temporary relief by rubbing the Aloe cream directly on the skin. Since there are no adverse side effects it can be used repeatedly.

Acne

As a skin beautifier, Aloe vera has been used throughout time by the Chinese, Egyptians, Greeks and countless others. When applied to skin injuries, Aloe gel helps to produce quick and often dramatic results. The gel forms an invisible coating which acts as a protective dressing, preventing further infection and allowing healing to take place. Modern Egyptian doctors used Aloe vera gel to treat three young women with acne vulgaris. The treatment lasted one month and two of the women became entirely free of acne, while the third showed great improvement.

Seborrhea and Baldness

The doctors also found Aloe gel effective in treating seborrhea and baldness. Three people suffering from seborrhea and dandruff had their scalps treated with Aloe pulp. Oiliness of the scalp decreased within the first week, and they were pleased to discover that the pulp treatment even seemed to cause hair re-growth.

U.S. scientists are showing a greater interest in Aloe vera, but to date, the most extensive studies have been conducted in the Soviet Union. At the Moscow Stomological Institute, scientists showed that Aloe extract in an aqueous solution regenerated nerve fibers. They also found Aloe vera extract effective against hearing impairments; application of the extract prevented the destruction of remaining nerve fibers and restored auditory function in patients with poor hearing.

Pulmonary Tuberculosis

Other Soviet research involved patients with pulmonary tuberculosis. This study was the first of its kind in scientific literature. Seventy-five patients were given inhalations of Aloe vera extract. The mixture was inhaled once in the morning and once at night. Aloe Vera's efficacy was manifest after only two or three days. Patients slept better, coughed less, chest pains ceased, appetite improved and temperatures became normal. X-rays showed a decrease in infiltration in the lungs. These scientists concluded that Aloe vera could safely be given to patients with pulmonary tuberculosis, since 2,000 inhalations had proved it non-toxic.

A South African researcher also found Aloe Vera juice effective against the bacillus that causes tuberculosis. He discovered that the juice would stop bacterial growth, and that the active substances in the juice lay in the compounds of aloin and Aloe-emodin.

Anemia and Bed Wetting

Again in the USSR, pediatricians have treated anemia and bed-wetting in children. Because many common iron preparations taste unpleasant, are poorly assimilated and often cause stomach disorders in children, clinicians added Aloe vera syrup to an iron preparation. They found that Aloe preserved the iron in its most active and potent form, that it reduced the irritating effect of iron in the gastrointestinal tract, and made the preparation taste better. This same preparation of Aloe vera syrup and iron was also used effectively for adult anemia.

In the cases of bed-wetting, Aloe extract was injected daily in dosages according to age. The bed-wetting completely disappeared after seven to ten injections. The injections also cleared up symptoms that often accompany bed-wetting, such as skin pallor, irritability, poor appetite, anemia and low spirits. Previously irritable children became cheerful and happy.

Nasal Preparation

People who suffer from chronic nose congestion find that after using many nasal preparations for a time, their mucous membranes often become irritated and congestion worsen. Two separate studies by Moscow scientists used an extract and injections of Aloe to treat this condition. In the first study of 25 patients, five to six drops of the extract were placed into each nostril, two or three times daily.

Twenty-four hours later the symptoms had usually cleared up. Subsequent use of the Aloe extract nose drops did not cause any irritation in the nasal passages. The second study involved 15 patients with more acute congestion. These people were given a total of ten injections of Aloe vera extract. After the first injections, all patients were relieved of the headaches that had plagued them, were able to breathe and smell with greater ease, and had a significant decrease in nasal secretions.

Periodontosis (disease of the bone holding teeth) was treated with Aloe vera by Russian doctors. They found that, "Under the influence of Aloe extract the activity of cell enzymes increases...three to four injections reduced bleeding from the gums, itching of the gums disappeared, and six to eight injections resulted in the disappearance of secretion from the gum pockets. The unpleasant taste and odor in the mouth disappeared, as well as nagging tooth aches. After 12 to 15 injections, the patients experienced a sensation of freshness in the oral cavity and a feeling of tooth stability."

Peptic Ulcers

Although heretofore the Russians have been doing most of the Aloe vera studies, the West is now beginning to explore its mysteries. Practitioners in Florida decided to see if Aloe would be helpful in treating peptic ulcers. Twelve patients of varying ages were treated with Aloe vera gel. In every case the ulcers were healed and no relapse had occurred within a year of the treatment. The doctors stated: "The response was so favorable that it (Aloe) created the clinical impression that this medication can certainly delay and perhaps prevent the development of a peptic ulcer. We do believe that this method of treating ulcers offers great hope for the future."

Healing Radiation Burns

The abilities of this plant to cure or alleviate the ailments just described are impressive in themselves, but its uses are not limited to these applications. The plant is perhaps better known for its external or cosmetic uses. A study sponsored by the United States Atomic Energy commission (now the Nuclear Regulatory Commission) found Aloe vera extremely effective in healing radiation burns. "Treatment with Aloe hastened both the degenerative and reparative phases of the lesion so that complete healing of the ulcer (caused by beta radiation) was accomplished within two months of treatment, while the untreated ulcerations were still not completely healed more than four months after irradiation."

Some scientists speculate that perhaps the wound-healing property of Aloe vera may be related to its antibacterial activity. One study reported that Aloe vera inhibited the growth of two strains of



staphylococcus, three types of salmonella and other bacteria, although this finding has not yet been substantiated to the satisfaction of the entire scientific community. Whether the burn-healing properties of Aloe vera are a result of antibacterial activity or an as yet unknown activity, there is a consensus among scientists that it is indeed an effective treatment for burns.

Several hospitals reported very good results with Aloe in the treatment of X-ray and other radiation burns. According to one source, Aloe ointment was 50 percent better for burn treatment than the other remedies usually considered the most effective. The FDA, upon reviewing evidence that Aloe vera was effective for burn treatment, admitted that the ointment actually regenerated skin tissue. Quite a statement from an agency that is extremely wary, if not down-right reluctant, in handing out praise!

Those who do make a daily habit of drinking Aloe juice say that they have more energy, their digestion is better and they feel healthier in general. If these people believe that Aloe will help the body rid itself of ulcers, constipation, colitis and arthritis (to name just a few), then drinking Aloe juice may be one of the best preventive measures available.

According to still another study done by the Russians, Aloe vera stimulated the normal protective function of the body and increased the body's ability to handle harmful substances.

Despite the tests and experiments to discover the whys and wherefores of Aloe Vera's efficacy, the FDA has not approved it for any ailment except minor first aid. However, manufacturers of Aloe products have received a vast number of testimonials from people who describe benefits they have experienced from its use. External applications seem to work more rapidly than internal ones but the results of both, according to these grateful letters are dramatic.

Among other names, Aloe vera has been called the "miracle plant." An ever increasing number of scientific studies, countless testimonials and thousands of years of use by people the world over are proclaiming that it is indeed. Viva Aloe!

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