

## Patient Fact Sheet

# ALOE VERA

**ALOE VERA** is a fleshy plant that initially came from southern Africa, but is now grown all over the world. Two parts of the plant are used as medicine. The clear **gel** from the inside of the leaves is available as the gel, or diluted as a juice. It is used in many skin care products, and also taken by mouth. The **leaf lining** (also called “**latex**”) is a thick, sticky liquid that can be dried and used as a laxative (to cause bowel movements).

### WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Aloe gel is used externally for burns, dry skin, psoriasis, and cuts and scrapes
- ◆ It is used inside the mouth for canker sores.
- ◆ The gel is taken orally for stomach ulcers and diabetes.
- ◆ Acemannan from aloe gel is being studied for cancer, HIV/AIDS, and inflammatory bowel disease.
- ◆ The leaf lining is used as a laxative.

### WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ Aloe vera gel helps **burns** and **scrapes** heal faster. It also decreases swelling and keeps bacteria from growing.
- ◆ An extract of aloe vera gel may help **psoriasis**.
- ◆ In animals, aloe has helped heal burning and irritation of the skin from **radiation**, but the only study done in humans who were getting radiation showed that it did not help. More studies are needed.
- ◆ Aloe gel may help stomach **ulcers**, but more studies are needed.
- ◆ Aloe gel can lower blood sugars in animals, but there are no studies of its use for humans with **diabetes**.
- ◆ In one study, acemannan from aloe caused increased white blood cells in people with **HIV**, but it did not help their antiviral medications work better. More studies are needed.
- ◆ Acemannan has helped some animals with **cancer** live longer. Human studies of a special form of aloe that is safe to take as an injection (shot) are beginning.
- ◆ Aloe’s leaf lining is a very strong **laxative** (it causes bowel movements). It works in several hours or overnight. It can cause more cramping, nausea, and diarrhea than other stimulant laxatives.

(continued)

## **WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?**

- ◆ Allergic reactions are possible. A few people have allergic skin reactions to aloe.
- ◆ Aloe gel can sting the skin when it is first put on. Keeping it cold helps prevent this.
- ◆ No long-term problems have been found from aloe gel.
- ◆ The leaf lining can cause cramping, nausea, and diarrhea. Overdoses can cause intestinal bleeding and kidney damage. Long-term use can cause damage to the intestine.

## **IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?**

Aloe is not recommended for oral (internal) use by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, or for children younger than 12.

## **WILL IT INTERFERE WITH MY OTHER MEDICATIONS OR MY MEDICAL CONDITION?**

- ◆ Aloe gel may lower blood sugars, so diabetics should check their blood sugars frequently if they take aloe orally, and they may need their doctor to change their dose of insulin or other medications if their blood sugars are low.
- ◆ Aloe gel could keep other oral medicines from being absorbed, so it should not be taken within two hours of other medicines.
- ◆ Laxatives from the leaf lining can cause low potassium, which can make some heart medicines more dangerous.

## **WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?**

- ◆ Aloe gel may be applied to the skin three or four times daily as needed.
- ◆ Oral doses of the gel or juice vary.
- ◆ Doses of the leaf lining vary depending on what form it is in. Follow the package instructions and take the smallest amount needed. Aloe leaf lining should not be used for more than 10 days in a row.

## **WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?**

- ◆ Always tell your doctor or nurse practitioner if you are taking any herbal product, and before starting any new one. Your health care provider needs to know everything you are taking to help you make decisions about your health care. Herbs can cause problems with other herbs, dietary supplements, or medications.
- ◆ Herbal products may contain chemicals or other species of plants.

## **SEE ALSO:**

Aloe Vera Complete Monograph: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/aloe/aloe.pdf>

Aloe Vera Clinician Information Summary: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/aloe/aloe.cis.pdf>

Information on OnHealth.com: <http://onhealth.com/ch1/resource/herbs/item,15939.asp>