

## **Aloe Vera**

The stories of a miracle cure for eczema, IBS and arthritis abound but does Aloe Vera live up to its reputation as the 'Natural Healer'?

Aloe Vera has been used for medicinal purposes since ancient times – most probably as a laxative. There are over 240 different species of Aloe, growing mainly in the dry regions of Africa, Asia, Europe and America.

Aloe Vera is a member of the Lily family even though it is cactus-like in appearance. Four are recognized as having nutritional value, with Aloe barbadensis miller being most commonly used in most commercial Aloe products.

Aloe Vera is probably best known as a soothing topical remedy for minor burns and wounds. It continues to be popular for treating sunburns and other first-degree burns because it appears to speed healing.

If taken as a drink Aloe Vera's main benefit appears to be its effect on the digestive and immune systems to help with heartburn, ulcers, diverticular disorders, and other types of digestive upset. Much of the evidence in support of the internal use of Aloe is anecdotal or circumstantial, more good quality research is needed in order to fully substantiate the claims made.

It seems that the quality of the product is key to its effectiveness.

Aloe products which uses only the inner gel have the greatest concentration of nutrients and other beneficial substances, because the inner gel is where all the good stuff is. The rind of the leaf has essentially no nutritional value. This means that the presence of the rind in products such as drinks is little more than a 'filler'. The promotion of "whole leaf," or products with the rind included, as being more beneficial in some way, is simply incorrect and misleading.

Some promote powdered / concentrated aloe as better than the plant itself. However the more natural the product (i.e. the gel) the more effective it is. Dehydrating and freeze-drying aloe or any other method can destroy the benefits of aloe gel.

Packed with a wide variety of essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals, enzymes and salicylic acid which have anti-inflammatory properties and the anti-microbial properties of anthraquinones and saponins there is no denying that Aloe gel is nutrient rich. It seems Aloe Vera has all the right nutrients and substances to do good things; we just need more good quality research to be certain about the internal benefits of Aloe Vera.