The Wonders of Aloe

Aloe is a small, fleshy plant with greenish-yellow wedge-shaped leaves. It is found throughout Latin America, the southern United States and the Middle East. Many people also grow smaller potted versions of the plant in their homes and gardens.

Aloe has been used as a medicinal plant since biblical times. It is now found in many commercial items, including skin care products, shampoos and conditioners.

Why do we need aloe? What is it used for?

Historically, aloe has been used to soothe and treat burns. Recent studies have shown aloe gel to increase the healing rate of a variety of skin injuries, including skin ulcers, frostbite, hives and poison ivy.

Aloe latex, which is made from specialized cells in the aloe leaf, has been used as a laxative and to reduce the size of kidney stones. It is also employed as a stool softener.

Other studies have found that aloe juice fights HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Certain compounds in the juice attack the virus directly; they also enhance the effects of AZT, an expensive but potent drug used to fight HIV infection.

How much aloe should I take?

The type and amount of aloe to take depends on the condition. For skin injuries and wounds, a liberal amount of aloe gel should be used, depending on the size of the injury. As a stool softener, 0.5-0.20 grams of dry aloe extract are recommended.

What forms of aloe are available?

The most common form of aloe is aloe gel, which can be taken either directly from the aloe plant and rubbed on the skin, or purchased in a more stable form. Aloe juice is also available in a liquid form, while aloe latex can be taken as a powder or capsule.
What can happen if I take too much aloe? Are there any interactions I should be aware of? What precautions should I take?

Aloe gel is considered safe for external use unless it causes an allergic reaction. If it irritates the skin, discontinue use and consult your health provider.

Certain precautions should be taken regarding aloe latex. Women who are nursing or pregnant should not take aloe latex because it may cause contractions and trigger a miscarriage. It should not be used for gastrointestinal illness, intestinal obstructions, appendicitis, or stomach pain. It may also aggravate ulcers, hemorrhoids, diverticulosis, diverticulitis, colitis or irritable bowel syndrome. Chronic use of latex could also lead to a deficiency of potassium, which could interfere with certain heart medications.