

Can this plant really soothe eczema?



Aloe vera devotee: Diana Church



EACH week we investigate the true worth of a potion that promises to improve health. Today we look at aloe vera.

SHOW a scientist a plant with amazing healing qualities and he or she will want to identify the magic ingredient.

But the ancient healing plant aloe vera defies this approach. Although the plant contains plenty of chemicals with healing properties, the quantities involved are small and no single ingredient can explain the powerful effects on the digestive, skin and wound repair systems.

Yet herbalists and nutritional therapists insist that this herb consists of more than the sum of its parts.

Aloe vera grows in dry climates and looks like a cactus, although it is

actually a member of the lily family. Damage to its thick, fleshy leaves causes it to ooze a protective gel, which forms the basis of many aloe vera remedies.

It was used by the ancients to heal wounds and infections, while Cleopatra tried it in skin creams to fight the ravages of ageing. In the Thirties, when X-rays were given in high doses, doctors discovered it helped heal radiation burns.

Dr Caroline Shreeve, a medical author specialising in herbal treatments, says: 'Aloe vera is a rich source of healing ingredients which enhance each other's effects. These include vitamins, minerals, proteins, enzymes and amino acids.'

'It works in three ways — as an anti-inflammatory agent, a wound healer and an anti-oxidant.'

Aloe vera is said to contain natural steroids, which relieve joint inflammation, and growth stimulators which help the

development of new tissue in people suffering from ulcers, minor burns, eczema and psoriasis.

It is often used to ease digestive disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome, and works well alongside prescribed medicines.

Choosing the right product can be difficult. Aloe vera is packaged as a gel for external use in skin conditions, and in tablet and juice form for gastric problems, arthritis, ulcers and thrush.

Some products are diluted, or have other ingredients added, so consumers are advised to look for contents with a minimum of 95 per cent by volume.

Nutritional therapist Diana Church from Bromyard, Herefordshire, says: 'Aloe vera is particularly useful for anyone with digestive problems. I recommend a teaspoon or two of concentrated whole plant leaf juice in water, half an hour before meals.'

'One of my clients has a hiatus

hernia, which meant she got this tremendous burning sensation in her throat after eating. Her

prescribed medicines didn't help but the aloe vera juice did the trick.

'I take it myself because I think it strengthens the immune system and acts as a general pick-me-up. It's very good, too, for hair and skin problems. I even give it to my cats as well.'

Liz Smith, 36, a mother of two, has suffered from eczema since she was a toddler. Her arms and legs were badly affected until she cut wheat, dairy products and sugar from her diet ten years ago. However, the eczema remains on her hands.

Liz, who lives in Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, says: 'Aloe vera gel hasn't cured my eczema but it really soothes the inflammation.'

For more information contact'

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