

Side Effects and Warnings of Some Aloe Vera Products

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The use of aloe on surgical wounds has been reported to slow healing and, in one case, to cause redness and burning after aloe juice was applied to the face after a skin-peeling procedure (dermabrasion). Application of aloe prior to sun exposure may lead to rash in sun-exposed areas.

The use of aloe or aloe latex by mouth for laxative effects can cause cramping or diarrhea. Use for over seven days may cause dependency or worsening of constipation after the aloe is stopped. Ingestion of aloe for over one year has been reported to increase the risk of colorectal cancer. Individuals with severe abdominal pain, appendicitis, ileus (temporary paralysis of the bowel), or a prolonged period without bowel movements should not take aloe. There is a report of hepatitis (liver inflammation) with the use of oral aloe.

Electrolyte imbalances in the blood, including low potassium levels, may be caused by the laxative effect of aloe. This effect may be greater in people with diabetes or kidney disease. Low potassium levels can lead to abnormal heart rhythms or muscle weakness. People with heart disease, kidney disease, or electrolyte abnormalities should not take aloe by mouth. Healthcare professionals should monitor for changes in potassium and other electrolytes in individuals who take aloe by mouth for more than a few days.

Based on a small number of human studies, aloe taken by mouth may lower blood sugar levels. Caution is advised in patients with diabetes or hypoglycemia, and in those taking drugs, herbs, or supplements that affect blood sugar. Serum glucose levels may need to be monitored by a healthcare professional, and medication adjustments may be necessary.

Avoid aloe vera injections, which have been associated with cases of death under unclear circumstances.

Allergies

People with known allergy to garlic, onions, tulips, or other plants of the Liliaceae family may have allergic reactions to aloe. Individuals using aloe gel for prolonged times have developed allergic reactions including hives and eczema-like rash.

Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Although topical (skin) use of aloe is unlikely to be harmful during pregnancy or breastfeeding, oral (by mouth) use is not recommended due to theoretical stimulation of uterine contractions. It is not known whether active ingredients of aloe may be present in breast milk. The dried juice of aloe leaves should not be consumed by breastfeeding mothers.

Methodology This information is based on a systematic review of scientific literature edited and peer-reviewed by contributors to the Natural Standard Research Collaboration (www.naturalstandard.com): Sean Dalton, MD, PhD, MPH (Harvard University); Ivo Foppa, MD, ScD (Harvard University); David Sollars, M.Ac, H.M.C. (New England School of Acupuncture); Catherine Ulbricht, PharmD (Massachusetts General Hospital); Catherine Kirkwood, MPH, CCCJS-MAC (MD Anderson Cancer Center, University of Texas); Samuel Basch, MD (Mt. Sinai Medical Center, NY); Steve Bent, MD (University of California, San Francisco); Cynthia Dacey, PharmD (Natural Standard Research Collaboration); Paul Hammerness, MD (Harvard Medical School); Jennifer Armstrong, PharmD (University of Rhode Island); Ethan Basch, MD (Natural Standard Research Collaboration).