

Effectiveness and Safety of Popular Herbal Remedies

1. St. John's Wort

Historically, St. John's wort has been used for centuries to treat mental disorders and nerve pain. Saint John's wort has also been used to treat malaria, as a sedative, and as a balm for wounds, burns, and insect bites. Today, St. John's Wort is used as a folk or traditional remedy for depression, anxiety, and/or sleep disorders.

Strength of Evidence

- St. John's wort has been studied extensively for depressive disorders in both the United States and Europe, and for its interactions with a number of drugs.

Study Results

- A 2009 systematic review of 29 international studies suggested that St. John's wort may be better than a placebo and as effective as standard prescription antidepressants for major depressive of mild to moderate severity. St. John's wort also appeared to have fewer side effects than standard antidepressants. The studies conducted in German-speaking countries, where St. John's wort has a long history of use by medical professionals—reported more positive results than those done in other countries, including the United States.
- Two large studies sponsored by NCCAM and the National Institute of Mental Health did not show benefit. Neither St. John's wort nor a standard antidepressant medication decreased symptoms of minor depression better than a placebo in a 2011 study. The herb was no more effective than placebo in treating major depression of moderate severity in a 2002 study.
- Basic research studies suggest that St. John's wort may prevent nerve cells in the brain from reabsorbing certain chemical messengers, including dopamine and serotonin. These naturally occurring neurotransmitters are known to be involved in regulating mood, but much remains to be learned about exactly how they work.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Research has shown that St. John's wort interacts with many medications in ways that can interfere with their intended effects. Examples of medications that can be affected include:

- Antidepressants
- Birth control Pills
- Cyclosporine, which prevents the body from rejecting transplanted organs;
- Digoxin, a heart medication
- St. John's wort may cause increased sensitivity to sunlight. Other sideeffects can include anxiety, dry mouth, dizziness gastrointestinal symptoms, fatigue, headache, or sexual dysfunction.
- Taking St. John's wort with certain antidepressants they may lead to increased serotonin-related side effects, which may be potentially serious.
- St. John's wort is not a proven therapy for depression. If depression is not adequately treated, it can become severe. Anyone who may have depression should see a health care provider. There are effective proven therapies available.

3. Aloe Vera

The aloe vera plant has been a source of many folk or traditional remedies and more modern medicinal and cosmetic products. At various times aloe has been used in tropical

treatments to heal wounds, and to treat burns, sunburns, and psoriasis. Today aloe vera gel can be found in hundreds of skin products, including lotions and sun blocks.

Juice from the aloe plant taken orally has been used in folk or traditional remedies for a variety of conditions, including diabetes, asma, epilepsy, and osteoarthritis.

Aloe has also been used orally as a laxative. Aloe latex contains strong laxative compounds. Products made with various components of aloe (aloin, aloe-emodin, and barbaloin) were at one time regulated by the FDA as oral over-the-counter (OTC) laxatives. In 2002, the FDA required that all OTC aloe laxative products be removed from the U.S. market or reformulated because the companies that manufactured them did not provide the necessary safety data.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the aloe vera as a natural food flavoring.

You can grow your own aloe, it is a dessert plant that loves sun and needs very little water. Just break of a stem and spread the gooey gel on burned skin but I wouldn't use it on open wounds or burns

Strength of Evidence

- Only a few small exploratory studies have been conducted on aloe vera gel for wound healing, and for treating burns or abrasions.

Study Results

- The results of these studies suggest that topical aloe gel may help heal burns and abrasions. One study, however, suggested that aloe gel inhibits healing of deep surgical wounds. Aloe gel has not been shown to prevent burns from radiation therapy.
- There is not enough scientific evidence to support aloe vera for any of its many other uses.

Side Effects and Cautions

Topical Aloe Vera

- Use of topical aloe vera is not associated with significant side effects.

Oral Aloe Vera

- A 2-year National Toxicology Program (NTP) study on oral consumption of an extract of aloe vera found clear evidence of carcinogenic activity (colon tumors) in male and female rats. Whether this finding is of relevance to humans has yet to be determined, but it raises concerns about use of oral products containing aloe vera.
- Abdominal cramps and diarrhea have been reported with oral use of aloe vera.
- Diarrhea, caused by the laxative effect of oral aloe vera, can decrease the absorption of many drugs.
- People with diabetes who use glucose-lowering medications should be cautious if also taking aloe by mouth because preliminary studies suggest aloe may lower blood glucose levels.
- There have been a few case reports of acute hepatitis following oral aloe vera use, but a casual relationship has not been established.