

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Aloe vera is a succulent plant that's used in traditional medicine. The clear gel from its leaves can be put on the skin as a moisturizer and to treat burns. Some people drink aloe vera juice as a laxative (something that helps you poop). Aloe latex (yellow substance that comes from just under the plant's skin) is also used as a laxative.

You can inject aloe vera into your body as an alternative cancer therapy, but this can cause severe side effects including death.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Aloe vera gel (put on the skin) is used:

- To treat burns
- To reduce swelling, itchiness, or redness
- To reduce redness, rashes, and itchy skin caused by radiation therapy. It's also used to decrease redness and swelling of mouth caused by chemotherapy.
- To improve blood sugar level in patients with diabetes (when taken by mouth)

Aloe vera has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

It's generally safe to use aloe vera as a gel on your skin. But taking supplements or giving yourself an aloe vera injection (shot) can cause serious side effects.

Herbal supplements can also interact with some medications and affect how they work. For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of taking aloe vera supplements by mouth may include:

- Stomach pain
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Seizure (uncontrollable shaking or stiffening of your body)
- Low blood potassium levels
- Abnormal liver function

What else do I need to know?

- Let your healthcare provider know if you are taking sevoflurane (Ultane®). This is an anesthetic (medication to make you sleep during surgery). Aloe vera may cause excessive bleeding during surgery.
- Aloe vera isn't an effective cancer treatment, and it should not be taken as a supplement or injection because it can cause serious side effects.
- Pregnant women should not take aloe vera as its safety is not known.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Aloe Vera - Last updated on March 20, 2024

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