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# 7 Amazing Uses for Aloe Vera

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## Overview

[Aloe vera](#) gel is widely known to relieve [sunburn](#) and help heal wounds. But did you know that your favorite potted plant can be used for much more than sunburn relief and household décor?

The succulent has a long history of being used for medicinal purposes, dating back to ancient Egypt. The plant is native to North Africa, Southern Europe, and the Canary Islands. Today, aloe vera is grown in tropical climates worldwide. From relieving [heartburn](#) to potentially slowing the spread of [breast cancer](#), researchers are just beginning to unlock the benefits of this universal plant and its many byproducts.

## Heartburn relief

[Gastroesophageal reflux disease](#) (GERD) is a digestive disorder that often results in heartburn. A 2010 [review](#) suggested that consuming 1 to 3 ounces of aloe gel at mealtime could reduce

Medically reviewed by [Debra Rose Wilson, PhD, MSN, RN, IBCLC, AHN-BC, CHT](#) on September 6, 2016 — Written by Summer Fanous

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the severity of GERD. It may also ease other digestion-related problems. The plant's low toxicity makes it a safe and gentle remedy for heartburn.

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## Keeping produce fresh

A [2014 study](#) published online by the Cambridge University Press looked at tomato plants coated with aloe gel. The report showed evidence that the coating successfully blocked the growth of many types of [harmful bacteria](#) on the vegetables. Similar results were found in [a different study](#) with apples. This means that aloe gel could help fruits and vegetables stay fresh, and eliminate the need for dangerous chemicals that extend the shelf life of produce.

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## An alternative to mouthwash

In a [2014 study](#) published in the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences, researchers found [aloe vera extract](#) to be a safe and effective alternative to chemical-based mouthwashes. The plant's natural ingredients, which include a healthy dose of vitamin C, can block plaque. It can also provide relief if you have [bleeding](#) or [swollen](#) gums.

## Lowering your blood sugar

Ingesting two tablespoons of aloe vera juice per day can cause blood sugar levels to [fall](#) in people with [type 2 diabetes](#), according to [a study](#) in *Phytomedicine: International Journal of Phytotherapy and Phytopharmacy*. This could mean that aloe vera may have a future in diabetes treatment. These results were confirmed by [another study](#) published in *Phytotherapy Research* that used pulp extract.

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But people with diabetes, who take glucose-lowering medications, should use caution when consuming aloe vera. The juice along with diabetes medications could possibly lower your glucose count to dangerous levels.

## A natural laxative

Aloe vera is considered a natural [laxative](#). A handful of studies have looked into the benefits of the succulent to aid [digestion](#). The results appear to be mixed.

A team of Nigerian scientists conducted [a study](#) on rats and found that gel made from typical aloe vera houseplants was able to relieve [constipation](#). But [another study](#) by the National



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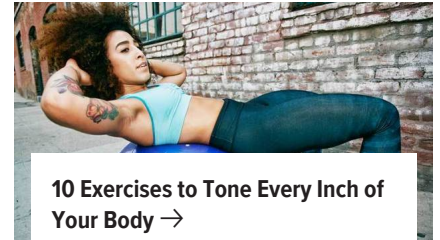


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Institutes of Health looked at the consumption of aloe vera whole-leave extract. Those findings revealed [tumor](#) growth in the large intestines of laboratory rats.

In 2002, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration required that all over-the-counter aloe laxative products be removed from the U.S. market or be reformulated.

The Mayo Clinic [recommends](#) that aloe vera can be used to relieve constipation, but sparingly. They advise that a dose of 0.04 to 0.17 grams of dried juice is sufficient.

If you have [Crohn's disease](#), [colitis](#), or [hemorrhoids](#) you shouldn't consume aloe vera. It can cause severe [abdominal cramps](#) and [diarrhea](#). You should stop taking aloe vera if you're taking other medications. It may decrease your body's ability to absorb the drugs.

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## Skin care

You can use aloe vera to keep your [skin clear](#) and hydrated. This may be because the plant thrives in dry, unstable climates. To survive the harsh conditions, the plant's leaves store water. These water-dense leaves, combined with special plant compounds called complex carbohydrates, make it an effective face moisturizer and pain reliever.

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## Potential to fight breast cancer

A [new study](#) published in Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine looked at the therapeutic properties of aloe emodin, a compound in the plant's leaves. The authors suggest that the succulent shows potential in slowing the growth of breast cancer. However, more studies are needed to further advance this theory.

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## The takeaway

There are a number of ways to use the aloe vera plant and the various gels and extracts that can be made from it. Researchers are continuing to discover new methods to put this succulent to use. Be sure to consult your doctor if you plan to use aloe vera in a medicinal manner, especially if you take medication.

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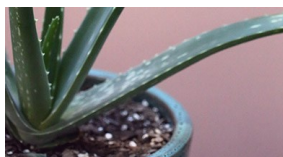
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