

How to check if you're buying good quality and beneficial Aloe Vera

"There are Aloe Vera products and then there are Aloe Vera products; and there is a real danger in people believing that Aloe Vera by itself is the wonder plant - no matter who manufactures products from it, what stabilization process is used, or what standards of purity are met."

Bill C. Coats, R.Ph., C.C.N.

Because Aloe Vera is a natural product, not a drug, its production and distribution are largely unregulated. Those who distribute it are not allowed to make medical claims (although many do) but at the same time there is unfortunately not much control over the end quality.

"The amount of Aloe Vera in each product can vary too. Some may not even contain the amount stated on the label. There are hundreds of manufacturers trying to sell their products. Unfortunately, by law they don't have to test their product for safety or effectiveness. And many don't! So our advice is to buy with caution." **Cancer Research UK (2009)**

"It cannot be excluded that manufacturers try to enlarge their profit margins by watering down the original Aloe juice." **Journal of Environmental, Agricultural and Food Chemistry (2005)**

"The quality of the samples analysed was found to be very inconsistent and in some cases extremely poor. Only three products, out of the nine analysed, contained satisfactory amounts." **Agro Food Industry Hi-Tech 9, 14-16 (1998)**

"Any liquid product on the market which claims to be '100% Aloe vera' cannot be genuinely quite 100%, although it can be very nearly so. And any liquid product which claims 'no preservatives' has got to be wrong unless it were canned or otherwise sterilised or was on very short term distribution - rather like fresh milk". **Dr Lawrence G. Plaskett, Positive Health Online (1997)**

"A product containing only 15 per cent Aloe Vera gel by volume can legally be called 100 per cent Aloe Vera juice." **Dr Peter Atherton, The Essential Aloe Vera (1999)**

Add to this its rise in popularity as an alternative medicine and you also encourage a host of companies to produce anything which includes 'Aloe Vera' on the label.

As a general rule of thumb, just like fruit juice, you should be looking for the product that is as close to 'fresh squeezed' as possible.

There are four steps you can follow to do this:

1. Avoid products which put Aloe Vera through unnecessary and damaging processes such as heating, boiling, freeze-drying, etc.
2. Look for the International Aloe Science Council (IASC) Seal of Approval and:
 - Check their website at www.iasc.org to ensure the product is not carrying the Seal fraudulently (many do!).

- Make sure the label says the product is a juice or a gel - together with the IASC Seal this tells us the product is 95%+ Aloe Vera.
3. Check the ingredients list on the label to make sure Aloe Vera (or Aloe Barbadensis Miller) is the first ingredient, not water or a sugary filler.
 4. Consider the colour and taste - it should be similar to fresh squeezed grapefruit juice, of a light yellowish to clear colour, with bits. It should have a strong taste.

Each of these steps is covered in detail below:

1) Avoid Aloe Vera that has been through unnecessary processes

Whole Leaf Aloe Vera

This is not a good idea for two reasons:

- The outer skin of the leaf is highly toxic - it is the plant's natural defence against being eaten in the wild.
- If the product has been filtered to remove the parts of the outer skin that are toxic, nutritious parts of the gel will also be lost. See the section on Filtered Aloe Vera below for more details.

As a further note when Dr Atherton researched his book *The Essential Aloe Vera* he approached the Poisons Unit of Guy's hospital in London. This is the leading authority on toxicology in the United Kingdom. Their reply was that they had no records of Aloe leaf side effects except that "some whole leaf products had been shown to produce abdominal pains and diarrhoea in some people".

Conclusion: Not Recommended - look for Aloe drinks that use the inner leaf gel only

"Double Strength" Aloe Vera

To achieve this the Aloe Vera has to be boiled down or freeze dried and then reconstituted with half the amount of water. This causes problems because:

- boiling or freeze drying the product causes it to lose much of its nutritional benefits so it becomes less effective
- the natural water content is part of what makes the gel so effective as water is required to help the nutritional elements be absorbed by the digestive tract

It can generally be compared to 'Orange juice from concentrate' as opposed to 'fresh squeezed juice', ie. more processes = less goodness.

Conclusion: Not Recommended - look for something more natural

Tablets and Capsules or Aloe Vera in powdered form

To achieve this the Aloe Vera has to be boiled down or freeze dried. This causes problems because:

- boiling or freeze drying the product causes it to lose much of its nutritional benefits so it becomes less effective

- the natural water content is part of what makes the gel so effective as water is required to help the nutritional elements be absorbed by the digestive tract
- One of Aloe Vera's benefits in liquid form is that it clears the digestion system so more vitamins and minerals can be absorbed. It is quite possible for tablets, capsules and pills to pass through the body untouched and no benefit will be felt.

Aloe Vera in capsule form has caused concern in the United States where it was linked with acute hepatitis in 2007 in one patient.

Conclusion: Not Recommended with the possible exception of use for Interstitial cystitis.

"Concentrated" Aloe Vera

To achieve this the Aloe Vera has to be boiled down or freeze dried and then reconstituted with half the amount of water. This causes problems because:

- boiling or freeze drying the product causes it to lose much of its nutritional benefits so it becomes less effective
- the natural water content is part of what makes the gel so effective as water is required to help the nutritional elements be absorbed by the digestive tract

It can generally be compared to 'Orange juice from concentrate' as opposed to 'fresh squeezed juice', ie. more processes = less goodness.

Conclusion: Not Recommended - look for a more natural product

"Filtered / Carbon Filtered / Homogenised" Aloe Vera

Any filtering of Aloe Vera is likely to remove some of the goodness and it is an unnecessary step if the gel of the leaf has been extracted correctly. However some manufacturers choose to liquidise the whole leaf first and then try and filter out the toxins from the outer rind. They do this either because it is cheaper or because, for marketing purposes, they want to call their product 'whole leaf'. The two most common types of filtering are Carbon Filtering and Homogenisation.

Carbon Filtering removes enzymes, proteins, mineral salts, essential amino acids, Vitamins B1, B2, B3, B12, folic acid, carotene, some fatty acids and salicylic acids.

Homogenisation takes out a great deal of the natural goodness in Aloe Vera as the gel is forced at high pressure through tiny holes. What is removed varies depending on the exact procedure.

There is no reason to filter fresh squeezed orange juice and there is certainly no reason to filter Aloe Vera. Although 'filter' often has good connotations, this is not one of them.

Conclusion: Not Recommended - there is no need to filter good quality gel

"Pasteurised" Aloe Vera

This involves heating the gel to a high temperature for a short period but doing so reduces the nutritional content of the gel. This process is often used by manufacturers to kill bacteria that may have got into the gel during the manufacturing process. In other words it is cheaper to pasteurise than to process the gel in sanitary conditions.

Conclusion: Not Recommended - look for a brand that avoids pasteurisation

2) Look for The International Aloe Science Council Seal for Content and Purity



This is an important aspect but often misunderstood. Be aware that the IASC Seal is much more about 'truth in labelling' than it is about quality gel. For example, as such a product containing less than 10% Aloe Vera can carry the IASC Seal as long as it calls itself an 'Aloe Vera Drink'.

The Seal is also used by several less reputable companies who have no right to carry it. The IASC website (www.iasc.org) lists products that can legitimately have the Seal as well as those from whom it has been withdrawn.

For consumers to benefit from the IASC Seal follow these steps:

- Check the product has the right to carry the IASC Seal on the official website
- Check the Seal on the product label is not a 'lookalike' copy
- Check the product (if carrying the Seal) is called a 'juice or gel' - which means it really is at least 95% Aloe Vera

Conclusion: The IASC Seal is useful when properly understood

3) Check the Ingredients for the Aloe Vera product

Many product labels state the product is "100% Pure Aloe Vera Juice" but when checking the ingredients, usually on the back label, the list will show nothing of the kind.

Many manufacturers unashamedly put large print such as "100% Pure Aloe Vera" on the front label when the actual Aloe Vera might really make up a very small percentage of the product. There is a similar trick using the phrase "made with 100% Aloe Vera" which often means a lot of water with 100% Aloe Vera added to it. There are not many laws or regulations to stop them doing this - so double check the ingredients list to see if Aloe Vera (or Aloe Barbadensis Miller) is the first one on the list.

Note 100% Aloe Vera juices cannot actually be achieved unless the drink is being sold from a refrigerated cabinet in a shop with a sell buy date of a few days more (as with milk or real fresh orange juice). Anything else must contain some percentage of stabilizers/preservatives.

Watering down, adding a sugary filler or flavours and colours are not a crime in themselves so long as the product is honest about it. A drink containing 10% Aloe Vera and 90% water is certainly better for you than a fizzy soft drink but it should also be priced and labelled to reflect this.

Conclusion: For the most potent Aloe Vera, avoid diluted products. Aloe Vera should be the first ingredient.

4) Consider the colour and taste of the Aloe Vera drink



“If it looks like water, and/or tastes like water, you are probably drinking water!”

Many Aloe Vera products on the market are not more than water. A top quality Aloe Vera drink should have a similar consistency to freshly squeezed grapefruit juice, bits and all.

It should also have a strong taste, which many people may find unpleasant to begin with. But if you think grapefruit juice before your first gulp, you shouldn't be too surprised!

The image above shows what a top quality Aloe Vera drink should look like.

A Final Note: Quality Aloe Vera is not 'black and white'!

It is important to understand that the above guidelines will help you find the best quality Aloe Vera drinks. However you may find that you also experience some benefits from lower quality products, because they also contain some of the properties of the original Aloe leaf gel that our bodies respond well to.

It is more usual though that you will probably not experience much benefit from low quality, cheaply produced or highly processed Aloe Vera products, because of the reasons outlined above. Always remember that just because one brand of Aloe Vera might not work for you, doesn't mean that Aloe Vera doesn't work! You need to try a better quality product to experience all the many health benefits to be achieved from Aloe Vera, which is indeed 'the miracle plant'!