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**Tara Parker-Pope on Health**



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## The Alternative Medicine Cabinet: Aloe Vera for Burns

By [Anahad O'Connor](#)

*Anahad O'Connor, who writes the "Really?" column for The New York Times, explores the claims and the science behind various alternative remedies that you may want to consider for your family medicine cabinet.*



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times What alternative remedies belong in your home medicine cabinet?

*The Remedy:* **Aloe Vera**

*The Claim:* It heals burns.

*The Science:* Aloe vera gel may very well be the crown jewel of skin-soothing treatments for damaged skin. And for good reason: Numerous studies have provided evidence that it can heal the minor burns and scrapes that a harsh world can inflict on sensitive skin. Scientists suspect that has to do with the gel's anti-inflammatory properties.

[One randomized study by a team of surgeons](#) in 2009, for example, looked at 30 patients with second-degree burns and found that aloe cream completely healed minor wounds in less than 16 days, compared to 19 days for silver sulfadiazine, a common antibacterial cream used to treat burns.

To be sure, not every study has had conclusive findings. [Another one published in the journal Burns in 2007](#) looked at data from four different studies that included a total of 371 patients with various types of wounds and burns. The authors stopped short of recommending aloe vera gel for all burn and wound healing. "However,"

the authors stated, “cumulative evidence tends to support that aloe vera might be an effective intervention used in burn wound healing for first to second degree burns.”

In other words, experts say, for severe wounds that go beyond superficial damage to the skin, medical attention is needed. But for sunburns, blisters and small burns that cause minor pain, redness or damage that is limited to the top layers of skin, aloe vera could make a difference.

“There are factors in aloe that help the cells regenerate and heal faster,” said Dr. Lawrence D. Rosen, a pediatrician at the Whole Child Center in Oradell, N.J., who recommends it to his patients. Dr. Rosen suggests keeping an aloe plant in your home. Or simply purchase a leaf or two from the market and break it open when needed, he said.

*The Risks:* According to the National Institutes of Health, when used topically, aloe vera gel [has no significant side effects](#).

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Aloe vera gel works fabulously on minor sunburn. Keep a plant around for when the sunscreen fails. My