

Aloe Vera Rx vs. Frostbite

By Charlene Laino

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Chicago – A protocol for treating frostbite injuries using Aloe vera and aspirin has been developed by a University of Chicago research team.

All but one of 44 patients with frostbite injuries (three with third-degree injuries, 19 with second-degree, and the remainder with first-degree frostbite) given topical Aloe vera every six hours and aspirin (600 mg every four hours) healed without major tissue loss in the affected areas, reported Dr. Martin Robson, professor of surgery at the Pritzker School of Medicine. Topical Aloe vera consisted of an extract of the plant provided by the Dermaide Research Corporation of Chicago, admixed with a standard medicinal cream base. “These results are startling; a much greater amount of tissue loss is usually associated with frostbite injuries,” said Dr. Robson. “What we need to do now is see if the results hold up with a larger number of patients, but unfortunately, we’re not getting too many cases this year due to the mild winter.”

Dr. Robson decided to try this protocol after finding, in 1981, that human frostbite blister fluid contains both the potent platelet aggregate and constrictor of arterial smooth muscle, thromboxane, and inflammatory Prostaglandins. Aloe vera is a known topical inhibitor of thromboxane, and aspirin, an antiprostaglandin agent.

In the first step of treatment, the affected areas are warmed in warm water (104-108oF) for 15 to 30 minutes. Blisters containing clear fluid are then debrided to prevent further contact of Prostaglandins and thromboxane with the already damaged underlying tissues, he explained.

Since hemorrhagic blisters reflect structural damage to the subnormal plexus, they are left intact so as to minimize loss of surrounding viable tissue and prevent further damage to the microvascular network.

The wounds are then covered with Aloe vera, and the affected areas elevated and splinted as needed. Penicillin is given IV to prevent secondary infections.

The average hospital stay was six to 10 days, depending on the degree of injury. No side effects were reported.

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