



A Comprehensive Review of Aloe vera (Aloe barbadensis Miller): Phytochemistry, Therapeutic Properties, Pharmaceutical Formulations, and Cosmetic Applications

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ABSTRACT :

Aloe barbadensis Miller (Aloe vera) is a major plant of the family Asphodelaceae. It has been known for thousands of years in many cultures for its great medicinal, therapeutic and cosmetic properties. The present review offers a thorough overview of Aloe vera-based pharmaceutical and cosmetic formulations, its botanical definition, global classification, and complex phytochemical profile. The synergistic mechanisms of action of key bioactive constituents such as polysaccharides (e.g. acemannan), anthraquinones (e.g. aloin and emodin), vitamins, enzymes and amino acids are analyzed. The therapeutic value includes wound healing, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, immunomodulatory, antioxidant and anti-diabetic activities. Furthermore, this paper reviews advanced pharmaceutical delivery systems such as topical gels, creams, ointments, transdermal patches, and oral capsules as well as modern cosmetic applications from anti-aging moisturizers to specialized hair care products.

However, it has some disadvantages, such as chemical instability, microbial susceptibility and allergic reaction triggered by crude latex, compared to the advantages of high biocompatibility and multi-targeted effects. Systematic description of rigorous evaluation parameters, quality control tests and industrial manufacturing procedures including harvesting, fileting, stabilization and formulation compounding are provided. Finally, the review deals with the future perspective of Aloe vera research, emphasizing the application of nanotechnology (nanoparticles, liposomes, and ethosomes) to enhance the bioavailability and therapeutic efficacy.

Keywords: Aloe barbadensis Miller, Phytochemistry, Pharmaceutical Formulations, Cosmetic Applications, Acemannan, Quality Evaluation, Nanotechnology.

1. Introduction

The use of medicinal plants in health care and beauty routines is one of the oldest traditions of human beings [9]. Among the variety of plant species used all over the world, Aloe vera is a leading plant drug which has been highly valued in ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Indian and Chinese medicine [10]. Aloe vera, also called the “plant of immortality” or the “burn plant”, has evolved from a traditional folk medicine into a scientifically proven pillar of modern pharmaceutical and cosmetic sciences [11].

In modern-day science, consumer preference has shifted decidedly toward natural, biocompatible and plant-derived products in view of the rising concerns of synthetic chemical toxicity and environmental sustainability [12]. Aloe vera gel is obtained from the parenchymatous tissue of thick and succulent leaves and contains over 75 active constituents that show an amazing versatility for the treatment of dermatological disorders, tissue regeneration and dermal esthetics [13]. However, the formulation of stable, effective and standardized Aloe vera products is technically challenging because of rapid enzymatic degradation of the active polysaccharides and microbial spoilage [14].

This review summarizes recent scientific literature on the chemistry, therapeutic properties, formulation science, quality evaluation and future development prospects of Aloe vera products [15].

2. Definition and Botanical Description

Aloe vera is a perennial, xerophyte, succulent plant species of the genus Aloe (A. Officinalis), in the family Liliaceae (now Asphodelaceae) [16]. In appearance the plant has a short stem, a shallow root system, and thick, fleshy, green-to-grey-green leaves that are lanceolate, green-to-grey-green, and in dense rosettes [17]. The leaf margins are fringed with small, pale teeth [18].

Microscopically, the cross-section of the Aloe vera leaf is more complex, as it is composed of three different layers:

- Outer Protective Rind (Cuticle and Epidermis): A dense, fibrous green layer that builds up carbohydrates and proteins, serves to safeguard inside tissues, and controls transpiration [19].
- Intermediate Sap Layer (Pericyclic Tubules): A yellow latex layer that contains bitter anthraquinones (aloin, emodin, etc.) that have evolved as a natural defense to loss of the plant tissue to the herbivore [20].
- The Inner Parenchymatous Gel (Pulp): A transparent, mucilaginous and jelly matrix consisting mainly of water (98% to 99%) and complex polysaccharides, pectins, cellulose, hemicelluloses, lipids and amino acids; it is the main part used in the pharmaceutical-cosmetic industry [21].

3. Classification of Species and Subspecies of Aloe vera

Taxonomically, Aloe is an incredibly speciose genus with more than 400 species that are native to dry, desert environments in Africa, Madagascar, Arabian Peninsula and subtropical islands [22].

3.1 Taxonomic Hierarchy

Kingdom: Plantae [23]

Clade: Tracheophytes [24]

Clade: Angiosperms [25]

Clade: Monocots [26]

Order: Asparagales [27]

Family: Asphodelaceae [28]

Subfamily: Asphodeloideae [29]

Genus: Aloe [30]

Species: *A. vera* [31]

Binomial Nomenclature: *Aloe barbadensis* Miller (syn. *Aloe vera* (L.) Burm. f.) [32]

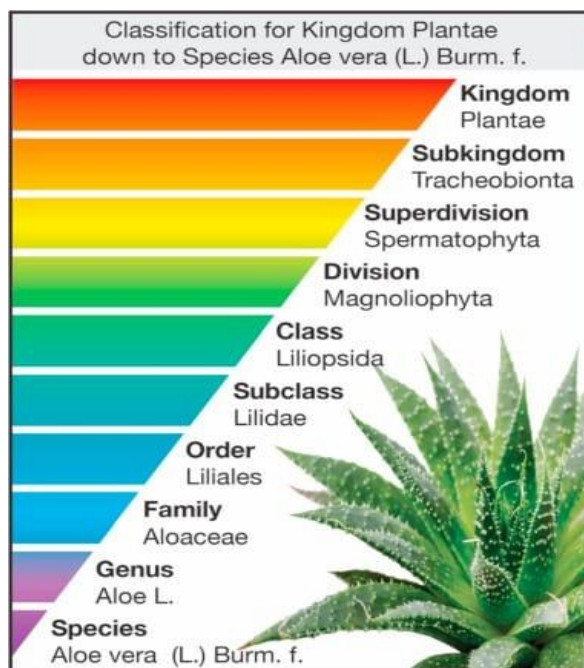


Fig N0.1 Botanical description

3.2 Major Industrially Utilized Species

- *Aloe barbadensis* Miller: Used in Canadian, European and West African traditional medicine for healing of wounds and boosting of the immune system [33].
- *Aloe ferox* Miller: Bitter aloe commonly used in preparations containing high levels of cathartic anthraquinones and in traditional purgative formulations [34].
- *Aloe socotrina* Lamarck: Native to Socotra, these were traditionally being utilized for their wound healing and antimicrobial action [35].
- Other notable species: *Aloe arborescens* (also called Adepali in South Africa and Lo-Jza in Japan, used as a useful remedy against rheumatism, diabetes and as a soap substitute) [43].

4. Phytochemical Components and Chemical Constituents

This wide spectrum of activity of Aloe vera is due to the synergistic activity of its various chemical components [36]. Phytochemical analysis of inner leaf gel identifies 75 bioactive compounds that are classified into groups as follows [37]:

4.1 Polysaccharides

The most biologically active component of the inner gel is the polysaccharides, which are mainly found in the parenchymatous storage tissue [38]:

- Acemannan: Major acetylated mannan (polydisperse long chain beta-(1,4)-acetylated mannans) involved in immunomodulatory, anti-viral and wound healing action [39].
- Glucomannans: Dietary water-soluble fiber that promotes cell proliferation, fibroblast stimulation, and collagen production [40].
- Pectins, Cellulose and Xylans: Responsible for the structural viscosity of the gel matrix (which is an important attribute) and water retentiveness of the gel matrix [41].

4.2 Anthraquinones and Chromones

These phenolic compounds are found mainly in the yellow latex underneath the outer rind and have been reported to possess very effective anti-microbial, analgesic, and laxative effects [42]:

- Aloin (Barbaloin): A C-glycoside anthrone that is a principal purgative component [43].
- Emodin (Aloe-emodin): Has anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and anticancer activity through the inhibition of cell proliferation [44].
- Chrysophanic Acid and Aloetic Acid: Anti-fungal and anti-inflammatory [45].

4.3 Vitamins

Aloe vera gel is a natural source of vital vitamins that act as endogenous antioxidants [46]:

- Vitamin A (beta-Carotene): Important for the maintenance of epithelial cells and the protection of visual systems [47].
- Vitamin C (Ascorbic Acid): Enhances the production of collagen, captures free radicals and improves immune functions [48].
- Vitamin E (alpha-Tocopherol): Inhibits lipid peroxidation of cell membranes [49].
- Cyanocobalamin Vitamin B12: Maintains a healthy nervous system and red blood cell production (trace levels are present through bacterial symbiosis) [50].

4.4 Minerals and Trace Elements

Minerals important to human enzymes and metabolism encompass calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, copper, zinc, chromium and manganese [51]. Zinc is an astringent wound-healing cofactor. Selenium is an essential antioxidant enzyme constituent (glutathione peroxidase cofactor) [52].

4.5 Enzymes

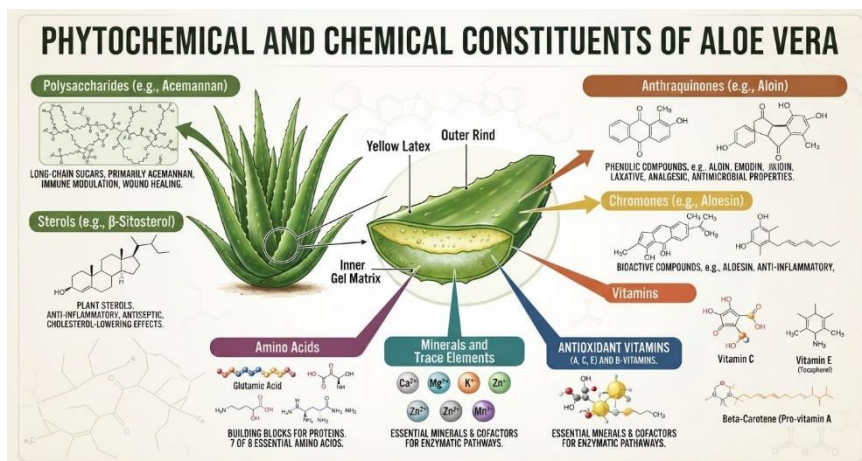
The gel consists of a range of active enzymes that change the inflammatory pathway and metabolic turnover [53]:

- Bradykinase: Aids to counteract pain and excessive localized inflammation when applied topically [54].
- Amylase and Lipase: Facilitate the digestion of starch and lipids from diet within the GI tract [55].
- Alkaline Phosphatase / Peroxidase: Involved in active redox cascades [56].

4.6 Amino Acids and Sterols

Aloe vera contains 20 of the 22 amino acids required by humans, including 7 of the 8 essential amino acids [57]. The plant sterols, campesterol, beta-sitosterol, and lupeol demonstrate strong anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and painkiller activity [58].

Fig No.2 Phytochemicals of Aloe vera



5. Therapeutic and Biological Activities

5.1 Wound Healing and Tissue Regeneration

The acceleration of wound healing in acute, chronic, thermal burn, and surgical wound models is well established with Aloe vera [60]. Acemannan and glucomannan are effective stimulators of fibroblast growth and expression of vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), thus increasing angiogenesis and accelerating re-epithelization [61]. Also, in the wound area, collagen cross-links and tensile strength are increased with topical therapy [62].

5.2 Anti-Inflammatory Activity

Aloe vera's anti-inflammatory activity acts by two mechanisms: blocking the arachidonic acid pathway (cyclooxygenase, COX) and the contact pathway of bradykinin degradation. Bradykinin is a powerful pain mediator in inflamed tissue [63]. Other plant sterols such as lupeol have anti-inflammatory activity by the inhibition of inflammatory cytokines [64].

5.3 Antimicrobial and Antiviral Activity

The anthraquinones, saponins, and phenolics in Aloe vera display a wide spectrum of activity including gram-positive bacteria (*Staphylococcus aureus*), gram-negative bacteria (*Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Escherichia coli*), fungi (*Candida albicans*), and lipid-enveloped viruses (Herpes Simplex, Influenza) [65].

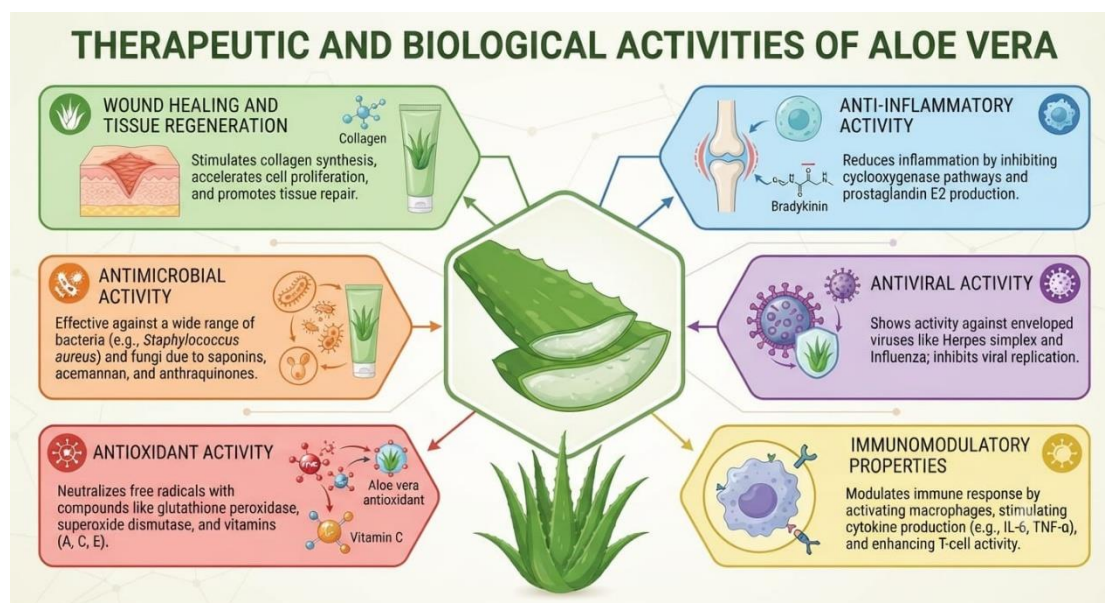
5.4 Antioxidant Activity

Free radicals lead to oxidative stress, which plays a critical role in cutaneous photoaging, cancer formation, and tissue destruction [66]. Aloe vera features various enzymes such as superoxide dismutases (SODs), phenolic antioxidants, and glutathione peroxidases, which can counteract reactive oxygen species (ROS) and lipid peroxidation [67].

5.5 Immunomodulatory Properties

Acemannan is a macrophage stimulant inducer and produces nitric oxide, IL-1, tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-alpha), and IFN-gamma that maintains host resistance in the treatment of opportunistic infections [68].

Fig No. 3 Therapeutic and Biological Activities



6. Pharmaceutical Formulations

Aloe vera in various pharmaceutical dosage forms has been prepared to enhance its bioavailability, stability and also to improve patient compliance [69].

6.1 Topical Gels and Hydrogels

Conventional dosage forms are topical gels, which can be rapidly released from the product and which produce a cooling sensation when applied to burns,

abrasions and inflammatory skin lesions [70]. Hydrogels are present as synthetic polymers, such as Carbopol 940, HPMC or sodium alginate for controlling the rheological properties and moisture preservation of crude Aloe vera extract [71].



Fig No . 4 Topical Gels and Hydrogels

6.2 Creams and Ointments

Aloe vera gel is added to lipophilic bases like cetyl alcohol, liquid paraffin, and white petrolatum, used in emulsion formulations (water-in-oil [W/O] and oil-in-water [O/W]), providing long-lasting moisture and barriers to dry and eczematous areas [72].



Fig No. 5 Creams and Ointments

6.3 Oral Capsules, Tablets, and Syrups

For systemic uses—which include regulation of blood sugar, enhancement of the immune system and gastrointestinal support—Aloe vera inner leaf powder and concentrated liquid extracts are encapsulated in both hard gelatin capsules and in compressed tablets as well as mixed into oral syrups [73]. Hard gelatin capsules are often coated with an enteric film to prevent the acid-sensitive polysaccharides from being denatured by stomach acid [74].

6.4 Ophthalmic Solutions and Transdermal Patches

Purified Aloe vera extracts have been proposed for use in ophthalmic formulations as non-preserved eye drops or ointments in dry-eye syndrome and keratitis [75]. Aloe vera is also used in more sophisticated transdermal patches that leverage the natural permeation-enhancing properties of Aloe vera to improve absorption of another co-administered drug [76].

7. Cosmetic Formulations

Aloe vera is used as an active component and as a natural base material for many cosmetic applications [77].

7.1 Moisturizers and Anti-Aging Formulations

Description: Moisturizer and anti-aging preparations are topical cosmetic systems formulated to add hydration to the stratum corneum, inhibit water loss from the skin, and reduce the structural characteristics of skin aging by active biological and humectant mechanisms [78].

Preparation: The aqueous phase, containing humectants (glycerin or propylene glycol), stabilizers, and an extract of the purified gel of Aloe vera in water, is heated to 70°C–75°C. In the meantime, the oil phase (emollient ester, cetyl alcohol, stearic acid, and emulsifiers) is melted at the same temperature and is gradually added into the aqueous phase with mechanical agitation at 1,500 rpm by homogenizer. It cools by slowly stirring until it reaches 40°C. Thermolabile active ingredients, natural preservatives, and plant extracts are then added [79].

Indications: Designed for daily facial moisturizing, restoring the skin barrier in dry skin, reducing the appearance of fine lines and counteracting photo-aging from UV radiation [80].

Advantages: Gentle and non-greasy hydrating product; good affinity to human epidermal lipids; high humectant efficacy due to high mucopolysaccharide concentration [81].

Disadvantages: Vulnerable to microbial colonization if preservatives are misused; fast degradation of active polysaccharide viscosity at high storage temperatures [82].

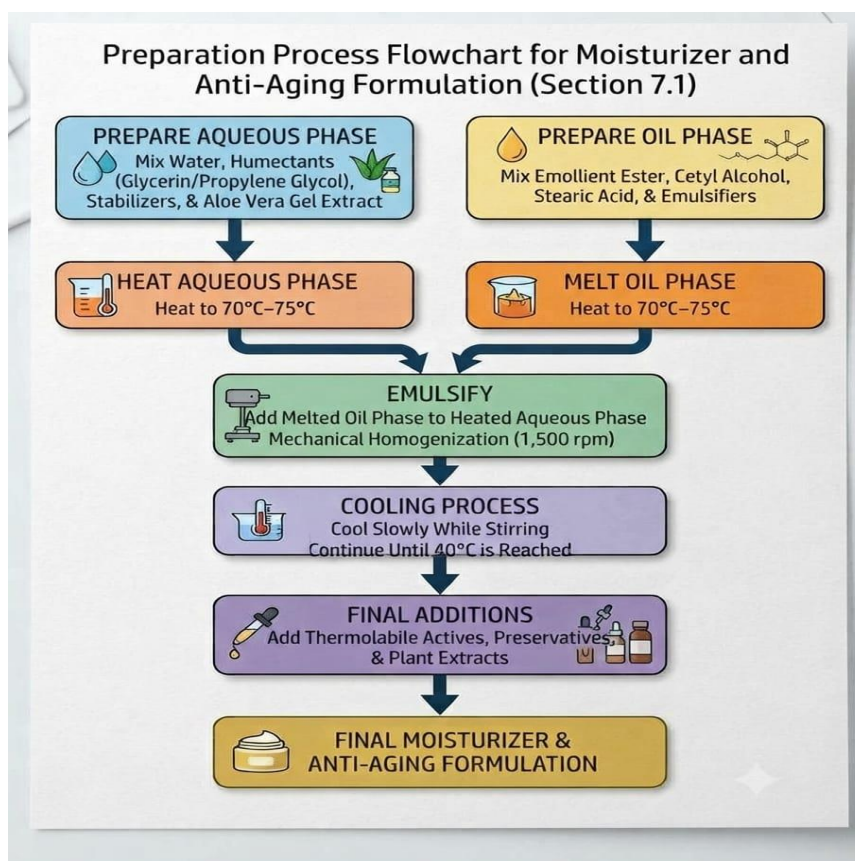


Fig No 6 Moisturizers and Anti-Aging Formulations Process

7.2 Sunscreens and After-Sun Lotions

Definition: Sunscreen and after-sun lotions are unique protective and reparative emulsions containing UV filters and soothing botanical agents designed to prevent development of erythema in response to UV exposure and to aid in cellular repair after exposure [83].

Preparation Technique: Sun and post-sun products are prepared by dispersing physical UV filters (micronized titanium dioxide or zinc oxide) or by dissolving organic UV filters into a stable oil-in-water emulsion base. Concentrated, decolorized Aloe vera inner leaf juice is added to the aqueous phase prior to emulsification. During cooling following emulsion formation, the products are enriched with soothing compounds such as allantoin and bisabolol to create a well-rounded post-sun healing benefit [84].

Application: Widely used in after-sun cooling lotions to soothe thermal erythema, relieve the pain of burns, and scavenge the free radicals generated by solar radiation [85].

Benefits: Provides a rapid cooling sensation on application; synergistically boosts the SPF value of regular UV filters; lessens the level of skin inflammation caused by tanning [86].

Cons: Not effective as a sole UV absorption barrier without chemical or physical filters; subject to phase separation if the electrolyte level of the Aloe vera juice destabilizes the emulsion surfactant network [87].

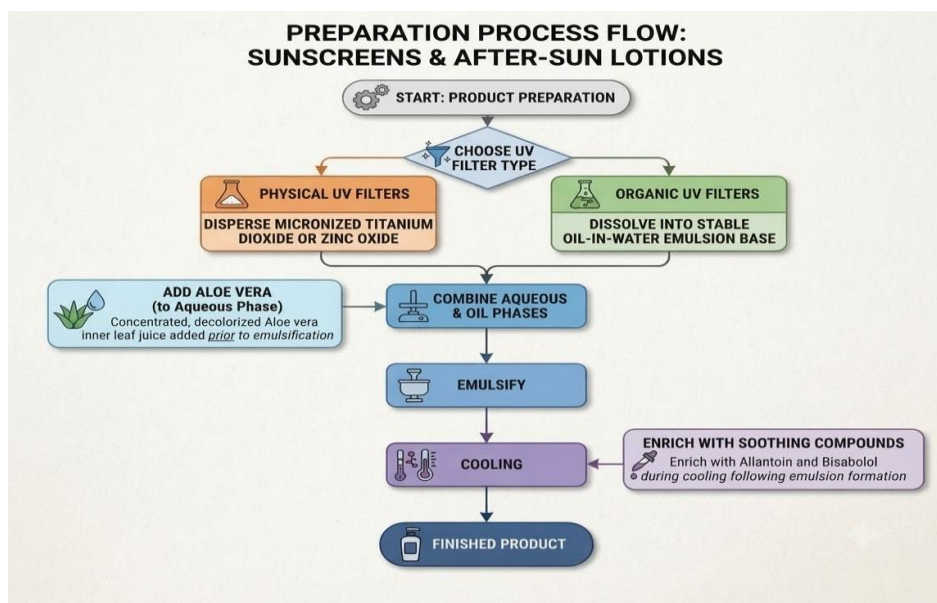


Fig No. 7 Sunscreen and After Lotions Formulations process

7.3 Hair Care Products (Shampoos, Conditioners and Serums)

Definitions: Hair care products are specific cleansing, conditioning, and treatment products that purify the hair and scalp of particulate and sebum build-up, balance the scalp, and repair damaged cuticular structures of the hair shaft [88].

Preparation: Primary and secondary surfactants (sodium lauryl ether sulfate and cocamidopropyl betaine) are diluted in warm water and stabilized with polymers, pearlescent agents, and standardized Aloe vera extracts for the production of a surfactant-based shampoo. In the case of hair conditioners and serums, cationic surfactants, fatty alcohols, and silicone conditioning agents are emulsified with concentrated Aloe vera mucilage using high shear conditions [89].

Applications: Used as an ingredient in a scalp-exfoliating and scalp-detoxifying clarifying shampoo, and a hair-conditioning serum for damaged hair cuticles and anti-frizz treatment for refreshing and shiny hair [90].

Pros: Proteolytic enzymes remove dead skin cells from the scalp; mucilage surrounds and coats the hair shaft without causing build-up of heavy silicones; builds a healthy scalp microbiome [91].

Disadvantages: Sometimes, the presence of high levels of crude Aloe vera can have an adverse effect with the removal or tearing of the viscosity or anionic surfactants resulting in a deterioration of the visual appeal of the product [92].

7.4 Facial Cleansers and Lip Balms

Definition: Facial cleansers and lip balms are surface-active and occlusive products designed to efficiently cleanse environmental dirt, particulate matter and makeup whilst maintaining the barrier function of lip skin and mucosae of the face [93].

Preparation: Facial cleansers are prepared from cold mixing of light amphoteric and non-ionic surfactants with glycerin, plant extracts and purified Aloe vera juice at room temperature adjusted to pH 5.5 suitable for skin [94]. Lip balms are prepared using a thermal fusion method melting the waxes (beeswax, carnauba wax), oil bases (castor oil, jojoba oil) and butter bases (shea butter) at 75°C followed by mixing it with Aloe vera lipophilic extract in a concentrated form or after dispersing it in a freeze-dried powder, then poured into different molds for cooling [94].

Uses: Facial cleansers clean off surface debris and makeup without disturbing the skin lipid barrier; lip balms prevent chapping, treat angular cheilitis and act as a softener for fragile lip mucosa, shielding it from chapping by environmental wind [95].

Benefits: Cleansers provide non-stripping, gentle daily cleansing; lip balms with occlusive waxes and humectant botanical extracts provide a sustained barrier on mucous membranes [96].

Cons: Water activity in lip balms may promote water separation or microbial growth in the absence of careful control; facial cleansers with high concentrations of herbal ingredients may experience color changes during long-term storage [97].

8. Advantages of Aloe vera Formulations

The pharmaceutical and cosmetic formulations formulated with the use of Aloe vera have several advantages [98]:

- Excellent Biocompatibility: Natural raw material has less adverse immunological effects than fully synthetic materials [99].
- Multi-Targeted Benefits: Combines all of the anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, antioxidant and tissue-regenerative capabilities within one botanical matrix [100].
- Synergy: Interaction of vitamins, minerals and enzymes, collectively, increases the total therapeutic strength more than that of any single active ingredient [101].
- Cost-Effective Cultivation: The plant grows well in semi- and arid climates without requiring much irrigation [102].
- Consumer Acceptance: Market share is robust owing to clean-beauty and green-pharmacy revolution [103].

9. Disadvantages and Adverse Effects

Despite its vast utility, Aloe vera formulations present notable technical and clinical challenges [104]:

- Chemical Instability: Active polysaccharides and vitamins undergo rapid enzymatic degradation, oxidation, and hydrolysis upon exposure to light, heat, and air [105].
- Microbial Susceptibility: The high water content of crude gel serves as an ideal nutrient medium for bacterial and fungal proliferation, requiring robust preservative systems [106].
- Allergic Reactions and Toxicity: Crude extracts containing unpurified anthraquinones (aloin/latex) can cause severe contact dermatitis, skin irritation, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea when ingested [107].
- Standardization Difficulties: Phytochemical concentration varies significantly depending on geographic origin, climate, soil composition, plant age, and harvesting season [108].

10. Evaluation and Quality Control Tests

For safety, efficacy, and batch-to-batch consistency of the formulations, and raw material quality, every formulation has to undergo strict quality control and testing [109].

10.1 Organoleptic Evaluation

Evaluation of color (clear to pale yellow for gel, and golden brown for latex), odor (typical vegetable smell), taste (bitter for crude latex and bland for the inner gel), and physical consistency [110].

10.2 Physicochemical Parameters

- pH of the gel: Determined using a digital pH meter; standard topical Aloe vera preparations may have a pH in the range of 4.5–6.5 matching skin [111].
- Viscosity Measurements: Carried out using Brookfield viscometers at specified shear rates to determine suitable spreadability and tube extrusion [112].
- Spreadability Test: Using a parallel-plate slip and drag instrument and measuring the force required to remove the slide from the film with the load, demonstrating ease of application onto the skin [113].
- Loss on Drying (LOD) and Ash Values: Determine moisture content and total inorganic mineral impurities [114].

10.3 Phytochemical Screening and Chromatographic Analysis

Employed for qualitative identification and quantitative analysis of marker compounds (aloin, emodin, acemannan) by means of HPLC and TLC [115].

10.4 Microbiological Limit Tests

Assessment of bacterial counts, molds, yeasts, *Escherichia coli*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Staphylococcus aureus* to evaluate sterilizing activity and preservative efficacy [116].

10.5 Stability Testing

Conducted using accelerated stability testing (e.g., at $40^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ and $75\% \pm 5\%$ relative humidity) to determine the speed of degradation, phase separation, and microbial growth [117].

11. Industrial Manufacturing Procedures

- Harvesting and Washing: Outer, mature leaves are picked by hand, washed with clean and sanitized water, and treated with a bactericidal rinse [119].
- Filleting: Removal of the spiny margins and the outer green rind to obtain the innermost parenchymatous gel free of the yellow bitter latex mechanically or by hand [120].
- Decolorizing: The crude gel is filtered through charcoal columns to eliminate anthraquinones (aloin) if clear, non-laxative products are designed [121].
- Mechanical Homogenization and Pasteurization: Short-time high-temperature pasteurization and mechanical homogenization are used to inhibit vegetative bacteria while maintaining the integrity of the polysaccharide chain [122].
- Stabilization and Compounding: Antioxidants (ascorbic acid or tocopherol) and approved preservatives (parabens, phenoxyethanol, or natural organic acids) are incorporated into the matrix before compounding into final pharmaceutical or cosmetic bases [123].

12. Conclusion

Aloe vera has now become high profile and describes a proven multi-purpose resource as opposed to traditional remedies, now being marketed worldwide by the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industry [124]. The high phytotherapeutic potential of Aloe vera can be related to the high amount of cell wall polysaccharides, vitamins, anthraquinones and enzymes which provide the plant with excellent wound healing, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial and antioxidant activities [125]. Common challenges with cultivation and extract production—such as chemical instability, microbial contamination, batch-to-batch quality variation, and material standardization—have been successfully overcome through the introduction of sophisticated extraction and formulation techniques [126].

13. Future Scope

Future Aloe vera formulations and research will combine biotechnology and nanotechnology to advance pharmaceutical approaches [128]:

- Nanotechnology Application: Encapsulation of Aloe vera functional extracts into lipid-based nanoparticles, liposomes, ethosomes, and polymeric micelles to protect fragile polysaccharides from enzymatic degradation, enhance skin penetration, and control release [129].
- Plant Cell Suspension and Elicitation: Defined high-yield, bioactive Aloe vera plant cell-derived bioactives generated via biotechnological plant cell culture independently of climatic restrictions [130].
- Advanced Clinical Trials: Double-blind, placebo-controlled, multicenter clinical studies to support novel indications, including advanced wound care, diabetic ulcer therapy, and anti-aging cosmeceutical therapy [131].
- Development of Green Chemistry: Formulation of environmentally friendly extraction methods and biodegradable green-formulated packaging to reduce environmental pollution created during manufacturing [132].

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