

Honey Helps the Body Heal Itself

by Andrew Kochan, M.D., Sherman Oaks, CA

Honey, a source of food for bees, is produced when they ingest nectar and then regurgitate it. During this process they add value in the form of enzymes, amino acids and proteins, aromatic, flavonoid, and phenolic compounds, and small amounts of vitamins and minerals.

Humans too use honey as food, and also as a salve, healing cream, eye drop, throat lozenge, antibiotic, and anti-ulcer medication. The ancient Egyptians, Chinese, Greeks, and Romans were aware of honey's healing properties.

Medicine's modern era has produced many anecdotal case reports and a few well-controlled studies supporting honey's effectiveness as a healing salve for burns and for infected and non-infected wounds. In 22 published trials involving 2,062 patients treated with honey, as well as 16 trials that were performed on experimental animals, scientists found honey to be beneficial as a wound dressing:

- Its antibacterial quality rapidly clears existing infection and protects wounds from additional infection
- It debrides wounds and removes malodor
- Its anti-inflammatory activity reduces edema and minimizes scarring
- It stimulates the growth of granulation and epithelial tissues to speed healing.

Although my major area of expertise is in treating pain, I occasionally see patients with injuries that respond to honey treatment. Two of my cases presented here dramatically illustrate this point.

***Case 1.** In March 2006, while working at a clinic in Honduras, I was approached by a woman who had been shot in the abdomen two years earlier. The bullet exited her low back just above the rim of the pelvis. Surgeons had saved her life and her bowel, but she had developed a fistula (passage) between the small bowel and the skin on her back. She was now draining smelly bowel contents from the hole in her back. Two operations to close the fistula were unsuccessful.*

She and her husband asked the clinic doctors for ideas on healing her wound. I suggested that she try irrigating the fistula with raw honey twice a day. We gave her a 3cc syringe and recommended that she obtain honey from a local beekeeper. As I would not be back in Honduras until the next year, she would be on her own. After following the procedure, she and her husband would evaluate her progress and she would decide whether to continue.

When I returned a year later, I was greeted as a healer. The patient and her husband had done as I had suggested. Within about four months the fistula had closed and skin had healed over the wound, leaving only a small dimple. Honey had done in four months what surgeons had not been able to do in two years.

***Case 2.** Velma Thomas, a patient of mine and a generous contributor to the AAS, has taken advantage of several aspects of apitherapy. Following a car accident in October 2007, she had a deep abrasion on her arm. Yet within four weeks the skin had completely covered the wound. There was no scarring, and the color of the skin was even starting to darken towards Velma's natural coloring! All this occurred despite her doctor's prediction that she would probably need skin grafting.*

Bees produce a magical elixir that we are privileged to use for our own purposes and that continues to be investigated. During a time of ever-increasing health care costs, I hope that the medical profession will appreciate and start to take advantage of the many contributions of the honeybee.

Dr. Kochan, the AAS's past president, uses honey and other bee products in his chronic-pain practice in Southern California.

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