

HOW THE MAGIC OF HONEY SAVED MY LEG

Honey is one of the most ancient foods and medicines. As a folk lore remedy it has a vast range of applications but modern Medicine dismissed it as all myth and magic. But now they have to think again as astounding research from New Zealand finally proves its worth.

There are probably more old wives tales about the medical benefits of honey than almost any other food and for years most of the medical profession has scoffed at them. The idea that taking a dessertspoonful of local honey morning and evening two weeks before the hay fever season could relieve your symptoms was a joke. The fact that hot water, honey and lemon were a better treatment for the symptoms of colds and flu than all the proprietary medicines was totally ignored. But now latest scientific investigation of a special type of honey from New Zealand has changed all that.

My interest in the medical use of honey began in the 1960s thanks to my dear friend, the late Dame Barbara Cartland. She was a huge fan of honey and introduced me to a plastic surgeon that she had persuaded to use honey dressings on his patients. The results astounded him and convinced me that its medical value was extraordinary. Little did I know 45 years ago that thanks to Dame Barbara I would avoid having my left leg amputated.

In spring 2001 I had a minor car accident which injured my back. Unfortunately the damage was so severe that I needed spinal surgery which left me with damaged nerves in my left leg. A few months later a tiny spot appeared on my calf which gradually became a small ulcer which rapidly became an enormous open wound which spread from the back of my knee to the ankle.

After two months of misdiagnosis, lost test results and ineffective treatment I called a friend who luckily was one of the country's leading dermatologists at London's Royal Free Hospital, Dr. Malcolm Rustin. It took him 30 seconds to diagnose the extremely rare condition of Pyoderma gangrenosum – a problem with the immune system which made my leg eat itself. I was hospitalised immediately and despite the efforts of many doctors and wonderful specialist wound nurses, repeated infections prevented healing. Amputation was high on the list of possibilities and that's when I insisted on trying honey and maggots instead of the endless antibiotics which weren't working.

Within three days of using Comvita sterile honey the infection was in check and the maggots did their job of cleaning up the wound. This was the first time maggots had been used at the hospital, so my room was filled with doctors and specialist nurses. When put on the larvae look like threads of cotton....but when they come off three days later, they are a bucket of fishing bait and a lot of white faced medics left in a hurry! To me, they were friends and I talked to them all the time. "Eat you little so-and-sos or you'll end up on a hook." Using maggots to heal infected wounds dates back to soldiers in the Crusades.

Thanks to a powerful drug treatment which Dr. Rustin battled to get for me, the disease became less active and finally stopped. But after six years the wound has still not healed completely and my wife Sally has to change the dressings every couple of days. At the slightest hint of inflammation or infection she slaps on the Manuka which nips it in the bud. I think of Dame Barbara every time we use it and how right she was about the magic of honey.

The first exciting scientific evidence of honey's healing power came from New Zealand where two British scientists at the University of Auckland were researching the traditional Maori medicine for all kinds of digestive problems and stomach pain. For centuries they had used Manuka honey – made by bees feeding on the New Zealand Manuka bush. They found that this honey killed the bug responsible for causing stomach ulcers, *Helicobacter pylori*. In their study the honey was not only better at treating the problem than the conventional triple medication but the patients were still ulcer free 12 months later whilst most of those on conventional drugs had relapsed within 6 months.

Dr Peter Molan is director of the Honey Research Unit at the University of Waikato NZ and amongst his many studies has finally explained why the half empty jar of honey at the back of the cupboard never goes mouldy. It turns out that all honey contains substances which are antibacterial and antifungal though none as powerful as Manuka honey. This contains a unique component eight times more effective at killing bugs than other honeys. Called UMF – Unique Manuka Factor – it's this property which makes the Maori favourite so potent. Look for a rating of 10 or more for serious therapeutic properties. Molan has also found that many other bacteria and fungal infections can be treated with simple honey.

MRSA – the dreaded 'hospital bug' - can be killed by Manuka honey. Sterile dressings impregnated with the honey are now available for use after surgery or on other skin problems like boils, abscesses or injuries. Dramatic benefits can be seen in the treatment of varicose ulcers which are so common in older people, especially if they have varicose veins or diabetes. Just apply the honey every time the dressings are changed. Delayed wound healing can be avoided by taking a gram a day of non-acidic ester-c and 10 mg of zinc each day.

Other Health Benefits of Honey

- * A small amount of honey daily, 2 teaspoons, is enough to provide the prebiotic food that all the friendly bacteria need to live on in the digestive system.
- * Honey is a natural treatment for gum disease as it kills microbes in the mouth and contains an enzyme that produces hydrogen peroxide which helps remove plaque from the teeth – the most common cause of gum disease.
- * To protect lips from weather damage use a thin coating of honey-based lip salve.
- * For minor burns and scalds, rinse thoroughly under cold water, pat dry and apply a clean sterile dressing spread with a little healing honey.
- * For coughs, colds, sore throats, add a dessertspoon of honey and the juice of a lemon to a mug of hot water. Use as a mouthwash, gargle or just sip to ease discomfort.
- * A dessertspoon morning and evening of local honey helps prevent hay fever if taken early enough.

Local honey, produced naturally and if possible organic, is healthiest and tastes great. Honeys from chestnuts, lavender, heather, thyme, pine forests – each has their own delicious taste. But for medicinal properties there's nothing as effective as New Zealand Manuka honey with a high UMF factor.