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## Honey of a healer fights bacteria when drugs don't

By Bob Condor



You might not think anything sweet can be connected with a medical journal called *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

Well, the DHB begs to differ. The June issue of the professional publication includes a Dutch research study finding medical-grade honey kills bacteria that show characteristics of resisting antibiotic drugs. Scientists tested the honey's healing power in both test tubes and on the forearms of healthy volunteers willing to be swabbed with bacteria.

While medical-grade honey has been closely studied and championed by Australian and New Zealander researchers, the Dutch study encourages acceptance of the bee product for use in major medical centers.

"Medical grade honey might be used to prevent or treat infections of skin, burns, catheters and other skin-penetrating medical devices," said Dr. Sebastian A.J. Zaat, the study's lead author, during an interview with the Reuters news service.

Zaat emphasized that bacteria doesn't seem to be able to build up a resistance to honey. The sweet stuff wins out.

One downside is honey, like many herbal and plant medicines, is likely to show variance in its antibacterial potency from batch to batch. To illustrate, those of us who love hot peppers when cooking know that one pepper can be much hotter or milder than the next depending on weather conditions while growing.

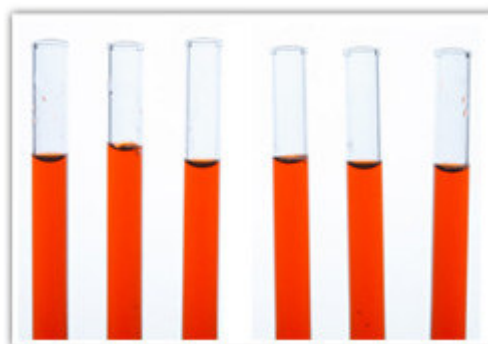
This variance has discouraged widespread medical acceptance, especially here in the States, because physicians, rightly or wrongly, are accustomed to the exactitudes of prescription drugs.

To counter concerns of the medical community, the Dutch researchers tested the antibacterial activity of a medical-grade honey called Revamil (Bfactory), which is produced in greenhouses under standardized conditions. The honey, more easily replicated from batch to batch than other types, was found to kill several harmful bacteria strains within 24 hours, including *Staphylococcus aureus* and *E. coli*.

Another plus of the honey from the lab and forearm tests: It blocked microbes on the skin from "colonizing" healthy skin cells.

Peter Molan, associate professor of biochemistry at the University of Waikato in New Zealand, has been advocating honey as a wound healer for more than two decades. Along with its ability to fight bacteria, he says honey keeps the affected moist enough to accelerate the regeneration of skin cells and reduce pain.

Molan's research unit at the University of Waikato has published studies showing medical-grade honey can offset the damage of *H. pylori*, the cause of most stomach ulcers and salmonella, back in the news with the current fresh tomato warnings. The Waikato lab has also turned out studies indicating medical-grade honey can fight diarrhea caused by bacteria.



Looking for medical-grade honey requires some hunting. Molan has promoted manuka honey, abundant in New Zealand. Honeydew honey, found in mountain regions of central Europe, has tested practically off the charts for antibacterial firepower.

For his part, the Dutch researcher Zaat says he thinks medical-grade honey might even help in the intensive-care unit: "We are presently investigating whether honey can be used to prevent line sepsis in intensive care patients. This potentially life-threatening infection is often caused by bacteria from the skin, which can be eradicated with honey."

One word: Sweet.

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