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Honey eliminates stubborn skin microbes

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Medical grade honey kills antibiotic-resistant bacteria grown in the test tube and eradicates antibiotic-resistant bacteria colonies" on the skin of healthy volunteers, Dutch researchers report.

Given these findings, senior investigator Dr. Sebastian A. J. Zaat told Reuters Health, "Medical grade honey might be used to prevent or treat infections of skin, burns, catheters and other skin-penetrating medical devices."

Few new antibiotics are being developed and the frequency of antibiotic-resistant bacteria is increasing, Zaat and Dr. Paulus H. S. Kwakman of Academic Medical Center, Amsterdam, and other colleagues, note in the medical journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

Honey, they point out, has been used since ancient times to successfully treat infected wounds. Moreover, there have been no reports of antibiotic resistance to honey. However, large variation in the antibacterial property of various honeys has hampered current medical acceptance.

To investigate further, the researchers tested the antibacterial activity of the medical grade honey called Revamil (Bfactory), which is produced in greenhouses under standardized conditions.

They found that antibiotic-susceptible and antibiotic-resistant isolates of several common bacteria, including *Staphylococcus aureus* and *E. coli*, were killed within 24 hours after incubation with the honey.

They also found that the honey decreases the ability of these microbes to "colonize" the skin of healthy volunteers.

After applying honey for 48 hours to "bacteria-laden" patches of forearm skin, the extent of skin colonization was reduced 100-fold. Moreover, 81 percent of the honey-treated skin patches yielded negative skin culture results compared to 21 percent of control patches.

Following these encouraging results, continued Zaat, "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."

SOURCE: *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, June 1, 2008.

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