

**On Nutrition: by Helayne Waldman, Ed.D., N.E.**

# Have a Problem? Find a Bee

History informs us of an old Roman saying, "Madam, treat your husband with honey and you will possess his heart."

Reaching back even further, we encounter the Babylonians. In this time and place, around 4000 B.C., it was accepted practice that for a month after a wedding, the bride's father would supply his son-in-law with all the "mead," or honey beer, he could drink. This period was called the "honey month" or what we today call the "honeymoon."

Clearly, despite the trepidation they can sometimes invoke, honeybees have won a secure place in our hearts, and in our language, for many centuries. So what is this magic they possess and how can we capitalize on it as part of a healthy lifestyle?

## **Pollen**

All bee products including pollen, are just bursting with phytochemicals, which as you may remember, act as part of a plant's natural immune system to help ward off disease and eliminate toxins. Flavanoids, carotenoids, (like those found in carrots and sweet potatoes) plus phytosterols, quercetin and lycopene have also been found in generous amounts in bee pollen. And these are the very same nutrients that have been linked in study after study to the prevention of cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In fact, chemical analyses have revealed that bee pollen is a



complete food, meaning that it contains all of the necessary elements not only to sustain life but to help it thrive. Just ask the rats who were fed nothing but bee pollen during a 1999 study from Northeastern Ohio University. Not only did they build more lean muscle mass and less body fat than their chow-fed companions, they also developed heavier brains, adding true meaning to the phrase "brains and brawn."

Race horses, too, are fed copious amounts of pollen before a big race, to provide high energy nutrition and to produce a sleek and shiny "winning" coat.

While the majority of us don't spend our days running around a racetrack, many of us do, distressingly, spend hours wiping our watery eyes and tissue-catching the all-too-frequent sneeze. Happily, both research and anecdotal evidence point to a starring role for pollen here: that of helping to desensitize us against seasonal allergies. In fact allergy sufferers often turn to bee pollen in an attempt to confront pollen allergies or more generalized hay fever, hoping that consuming small

amounts of bee pollen over time will work like allergy shots, gradually desensitizing the body to the offending stimuli. Not a panacea for everyone, but a godsend for some.

## **Propolis**

Suppose you are a bee, and along with your fellow workers, you are intent on keeping invaders out of your hive. An invader finds his way in, nonetheless, and though you may be able to sting it to death, you're now left with a decaying, bacterial-laden corpse on your hands -- or wings, in this case. Propolis, a bee-made mixture of tree resins, wax, honey and enzymes, comes to the rescue as an embalming fluid. In a flash the invader's carcass is quickly "mummified" and rendered harmless. In ancient times, the Egyptians took their cues from the wisdom of the bees, and embalmed their mummies using propolis as well.

On a more practical level, propolis behaves like a powerful antibiotic. Used topically, it stimulates the healing process while preventing the growth of harmful bacteria and fungi both externally and internally. As an internal tincture, external salve, or a burn paste, propolis can clearly prevent infection, inhibit bacterial growth in the mouth, and unmistakably thwart the ambitions of invading fungi and viruses such as herpes and

influenza. Moreover, extracts of propolis have recently been shown to have anti-inflammatory effects in both mice and men, which means additional support for conditions such as arthritis, asthma, dermatitis and inflammatory bowel disease.

### **Royal Jelly**

Royal Jelly is the food that bees produce to develop larvae in the beehive. The larvae, though, are permitted to feast on the jelly for three days and three days only. Thereafter, only the queen larvae continues to eat royal jelly throughout her life, turning her into a sexual colossus, laying more than her weight in eggs daily, and outliving her worker bee subjects by 25 times or more. In keeping with this royal tradition, traditional Chinese medicine describes royal jelly as “food of the emperors.” And for generations it’s been used not only internally to stimulate immunity, but also as an external salve to soften skin, remove wrinkles, and reverse eczema and dermatitis.

### **Honey**

Honey too, the goeey substance bees produce from the nectar they collect from flowers, has been revered throughout the ages - from Greece to China, to Sub-Saharan Africa to North America—for its ability to treat sore throats, skin and stomach ulcers, digestive disorders, and for dressing wounds. I recall my own father gently layering some honey on my cheek to soothe the pain and trauma of --- of all things, a bee sting!

Be careful and respectful of honey, however, if you are diabetic or insulin resistant. Despite its many charms, honey is still a concentrated source of simple sugars and should be avoided by those whose glucose tolerance is impaired.

Also beware of feeding honey to infants under one year of age. Unpasteurized honey, while no danger to children and adults, can introduce minute amounts of bacteria and fungi to an infant’s stomach, which without sufficient hydrochloric acid, is not yet prepared to deal with them.

If you’re a grown up, however, try painting a honey or royal jelly mask on your face. Leave it there for 15 or 20 minutes, and when you peel and rinse it off thoroughly, be prepared to sport the most kissable face in town!

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