

MANUKA HONEY PROVIDES SWEET RELIEF FROM MRSA

With a frightening number of community-acquired diseases spreading across our nation, it may come as a surprise that your first line of protection may be as close as your kitchen cabinet. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), a common strain of bacterium that has become smarter than antibiotics, continues to claim more victims. Earning its reputation as a “super bug,” MRSA has migrated from hospitals to schools and gyms where otherwise healthy youngsters have contracted chronic and even fatal infections from these antibiotic-resistant bacteria. When traditional methods fail to treat this infection, there may be an answer that is older than medicine itself.

The help is found in the beehive, and specifically, in a unique type of honey from the New Zealand Manuka tree.

Manuka honey has been used for centuries in traditional Maori folk medicine for treating fevers and colds and healing skin and stomach ailments. Known as “the Healing Honey of the Tea Tree,” Manuka possesses strong curative properties derived from powerful antibacterial agents and high mineral content. Although all honey has some antibacterial action due to its hydrogen peroxide activity, Manuka honey always seemed to have something extra. It is not surprising that Dr. Peter Molan of the University of Waikato in New Zealand began to investigate the healing anecdotes of Manuka honey.

According to Dr. Molan’s studies, a few areas of New Zealand produce a Manuka honey, which contains a second type of antibacterial activity. This rare secondary activity is measured on a scale of 1-20 with Manuka honey testing above 10 regarded as “Active Manuka.” Amazingly, this antibacterial activity is unaffected by enzymes in the body that destroy the hydrogen peroxide components. When used in wound healing, Active Manuka maintains its potency even when diluted over 50 times. It also diffuses deeper into skin tissue than the enzymes of other honeys.

Manuka honey provides a moist healing barrier which helps prevent the cross infection of wounds as well as reducing scarring. It supplies nutrients necessary for healthy tissue regeneration and stimulates the growth of new blood capillaries. Honey draws lymph out to the cells while absorbing moisture; it provides an anti-inflammatory action that reduces swelling, pain, and odor.

Honey assists in lifting dirt and debris from the bed of a wound and induces sloughing of necrotic tissue. It stimulates white blood cells and speeds up the healing process. Unlike antibiotics, honey has no adverse side effects and does not cause the underlying bacteria to strengthen or create antibiotic resistance.

In *The Journal of Wound Care*, Vol. 13, No. 9, Molan and Betts observed that “in our clinical experience a variety of chronic, acute, infected or heavily colonized wounds that did not respond to ‘normal management’ have been treated with honey. Successful healing was achieved in all patients except those with arterial insufficiency. However,

the latter wounds remained free from infection and did not deteriorate further.”

Active Manuka has proven to be a powerful antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal agent, killing bugs such as MRSA, E. coli and Helicobacter pylori. The popularity of Manuka in wound care is growing throughout the world where it is often used when traditional methods fail to heal persistent wounds. Modern clinical observations document honey’s effectiveness not only in treating serious infections, but also in treating cuts, wounds, burns, insect bites, yeast infections, various skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis, and fungal infections from athlete’s foot to ringworm.

As reported on 6/18/07 by Carmel Thomason in the *Manchester Evening News*, Dr. Molan recounts his practical experience treating MRSA:

“Waikato hospital took up my suggestion to use Manuka honey to try to prevent MRSA infections. In one of the wards, where they had a long history of problems with MRSA, the charge nurse tried putting honey dressings on all patients with wounds when they had an MRSA outbreak. As well as clearing up the wounds that were already infected, there were no cases of cross infections.

“Now, whenever they get a patient with MRSA, rather than putting them in isolation they just put honey dressings on everybody with open wounds and they’ve never had a case of cross infection since. We’ve since tested Manuka honey against MRSA and other super bugs, and they are all very sensitive to it.”

“They (Manuka wound dressings) are being used but I don’t think people have really caught on to the idea that it can be the answer to the MRSA problem. People don’t realize just how much evidence there is and the reason why honey works – it’s not just an antibacterial activity – there are other beneficial healing elements, so even if a wound isn’t infected it’s still the best thing to use to get the most rapid healing without scarring.”

Beyond the recommendations of the CDC, what practical steps can one take to ward off bacterial contamination? In an email from Dr. Molan when addressed with this question, he responded:

“If parents are worried about this, there is a simple action that can be taken to prevent an injury becoming infected by MRSA and a health problem. Dressing the injury with honey will kill the MRSA. Even when a MRSA infection has become established in a wound the infection can be rapidly cleared by dressing the wound with Manuka honey. (There have been 9 papers published in medical journals reporting this, and I am aware of many other cases that have not been published.)

“Wound dressings impregnated with Manuka honey (which has a high level of antibacterial activity) were recently approved by the FDA as a medical device....Apart from removing the risk of getting an MRSA infection (or any other infection) in injuries, the use of a honey dressing will have the advantage of getting the wound to heal faster

than with any other treatment, and will prevent scarring resulting from the injury.”

Before the advent of antibiotics, it was not unusual for an experienced medical professional to slather honey on a wound to prevent infection and hasten healing. Now science backs up the folklore: Manuka honey is a very effective means of quickly clearing even the most heavily infected wounds, without the side-effects and potential overuse of antibiotics.

The Food and Drug Administration have not evaluated the statements contained herein. This information is not intended for the diagnosis, treatment, prevention, or cure of any illness or disease. For medical advice, you should always consult your physician. Honey should not be fed to infants under one year old.