*The Healthy Benefits of Honey*

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Thousands of years before refined white sugar appeared on the scene, people used honey to not only sweeten their food, but to support a wide range of body functions. Honey has been used in Ayurvedic medicine for over 4,000 years. Ancient Egyptians and Greeks were also very familiar with the medicinal properties of this sweet substance. Hippocrates, the “Father of Western Medicine” wrote that both honey and pollen proved effective in healing a variety of ailments.

Bees make honey using the nectar of flowering plants and then store it in their hives to eat during times of scarcity. Honey contains natural antioxidants, enzymes, amino acids, vitamins, and minerals, including calcium, iron, zinc, potassium, phosphorous, magnesium, copper, chromium, manganese, and selenium. Additionally, honey has been shown to contain valuable nutraceuticals, which help to neutralize free radicals in the body.

However, if you’re looking to reap the many health benefits of honey, you might not find what you’re looking for in a traditional grocery store. Pasteurization and processing has removed the pollen, beneficial vitamins, enzymes, and phytonutrients from most honey typically found on grocery store shelves. Experts agree that raw, unpasteurized honey offers the real health benefits. Unlike its highly-processed counterpart, raw honey has not been heated to high temperatures in order to gain that golden syrupy appearance. As a result, it is often quite thick and will crystalize over time. Getting to know your local beekeepers, and only buying from them, can help ensure you are buying a quality product.

Below are just a few of the many ways that honey can help improve your health:

* **Soothing a nagging cough.** You might recall a mother or grandmother heating honey for you to drink when a cough kept you up as a child. Turns out, there might be some truth behind this home remedy. In a study involving 105 children between the ages of 2 and 18 years with upper respiratory infections of 7 days or less and night-time coughing, a single night-time dose of buckwheat honey was shown to be an effective alternative in relieving the nighttime cough, compared to a single dose of dextromethorphan (DM). Honey can also be helpful in soothing minor throat irritations.
* **Relieving seasonal allergies.** Raw honey contains many of the same spores that cause allergy sufferers problems when the seasons change. Some experts believe that by introducing these spores into the body in small amounts through honey – a sort of immunotherapy – the body can become more accustomed to them, and the threat of an allergic immune response can be decreased.
* **Wound healing** – Honey has antiseptic and antimicrobial properties. In 2010, scientists from the Academic Medical Center at the University of Amsterdam reported in *FASEB Journal* that [honey's ability to kill bacteria lies in a protein called defensin-1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20228250?dopt=AbstractPlus&otool=inluvalib). As a result, some people have found that honey applied topically to wounds helps to keep the skin moist, reduce the likelihood of infection and help prevent/reduce scarring.
* **Improves skin issues.** Honey has a natural pH level of 4.5, which makes it safe to use for a variety of skin conditions including acne, rosacea, eczema and hyperpigmentation. When mixed with water, honey releases peroxide properties, which help heal acne and impede bacterial growth. To use as a cleanser, add a quarter-sized amount of honey to wet hands, massage into the face and rinse. Follow with moisturizer.
* **As a healthy sweetener.** Reach for honey over refined sugar when looking to sweeten your coffee or tea. Honey does contain a lot of fructose, however, so use it sparingly. Use of honey (even the raw variety) should be limited to less than one teaspoon a day.

Despite the many benefits of raw honey, there are a few important points to remember. Never give honey to children younger than 1 year old due to the risk of botulism. The undeveloped infant immune system cannot guard against infection. Additionally, those with bee venom allergies could have life-threatening allergic reactions to honey. So, for those who are allergic, it’s best to check with a doctor before using it.