

[IMAGE]

Honey in the Raw

By Zhenya K. Wine

Bees get a bad rap. All their hard work produces raw, unprocessed honey, which contains pollen with 22 amino acids, 27 minerals and a spectrum of vitamins, along with honeycomb, antioxidants and 5,000 live enzymes. Have you taken advantage of what bees can offer?

It may seem strange to some that scientists recently discovered a mummy buried with, of all things, a pot of honey. Even more surprising, the honey was still good to eat after thousands of years! To me, this makes complete sense - after all, it's honey we're talking about.

What makes honey so special? As an example, by combining a half cup of raw honey with a half cup of aloe juice or pulp and the juice of one large lemon, you can create an effective syrup for colds and cough that even finicky children will not refuse. All of these components are antibacterial and the syrup is soothing to the throat, which reduces cough. The star of this syrup concoction, of course, is the raw honey, which has not been pasteurized or filtered, and ideally is taken directly from the hive.

A bowl of honey. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Not all honey is the same - you know this by simply looking at the honey and smelling it. Honey that is full of pollen will be heavier than the same amount of honey without the pollen, and its smell will be rich and heavy. The honey quality depends on the amount of pollen found in the nectar the bees gather. Local honey contains all of the local pollens (some of which are irritants or allergens to us). By ingesting the pollen in honey you will, in fact, build immunity to the pollinator, and this is an easy way to prevent pollen allergies. The action is not dissimilar to the flu vaccine - by ingesting small amounts of the irritant, you build a tolerance to it. Ideally, you should look for the honey that contains both spring and late summer pollens in it. The best news about the presence of pollen in the honey is its change in taste - it has almost a "body" to it (like wine).

There are many subtle variations in honey made all over the world. Orange blossom honey from Florida or California is excellent for flavoring white tea due to its aromatic and exquisite orange blossom taste. Linden honey has an incredible aroma and medicinal function from the properties of the linden flower. Linden blossoms, which bloom in May, contain flavonoids, volatile oils and mucilaginous components that soothe

and reduce inflammation. These properties are then passed into the honey. Linden honey is "blond" in color and has a very exotic, flowery aroma. When my local beekeeper does not have much linden honey, I buy it in specialty stores (it comes from Europe and is marked as such). If the honey you buy crystallizes, don't be alarmed; crystallization only occurs around a pollen pod. If your honey crystallizes rapidly and in large quantity, this is a good sign it is loaded with pollen.

Raw honey has so much more to offer than the honey you buy in most supermarkets. The honey is created by bees foraging and eating plant food as compared to the simple sugar syrup that so many commercial and larger beekeepers feed their bees in order to meet the production demand. The reason honey is such a great healer is because it is composed mostly of fructose, though glucose and other sugars such as sucrose and maltose are also present. Raw honey that has more fructose (more pollen means more fructose) can be used in very small doses by diabetics since the fructose has a slower rate of transformation into glucose.

The list of raw honey's health benefits is impressive. It is full of catalase enzymes which help the body fight free radicals. These and other enzymes found in honey get destroyed if the honey is heated to more than 104 F to promote faster extraction from the comb. Raw honey also is rich in many flavonoids such as pinocembrin, pinobanksin, chrysin, galagin, acacetin, quercetin and kaempferol, which help the body attack allergens, viruses and carcinogens. In addition to these benefits, honey is packed with vitamins and minerals including riboflavin (B12), niacin (B3), pantothenic acid (B5), vitamin B6, folate (B9), vitamin C, calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and zinc.

The way in which raw honey is extracted and strained can tell a great deal about its quality. A "coarse strain" of honey retains the propolis - a gluey substance the bees collect from the buds. It has a dark brown or reddish color and looks like small granules in the raw honey. Although there are a lot of misgivings by modern medicine toward propolis, it has been used in traditional and folk medicine around the world for the past 5,000 years. Propolis is a substance the bees use not only as a sealant for the small cracks in the hive but also to build immunity in their young (like colostrum for mammals). Many humans respond with an allergic reaction when ingesting pure extracted propolis, but when the propolis is mixed in the honey, the body generally is able to absorb it without any problems. Propolis is used for treatment of inflammation, viral diseases, ulcers, superficial burns, canker sores and gingivitis, and can be used as an antiseptic dressing on open wounds. It also is believed to have an antibiotic, antifungal and even immunomodulatory function.

Please note that honey can be dangerous if ingested by children under 1 year of age due to the presence of botulinum toxin, from which infants can contract botulism (whereas older children and adults can destroy these toxins). The same toxin is the base of the well-known Botox, so it is no surprise that many cultures have used raw honey as a skin rub for thousands of years.

A bottle of honey. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The next time you swat at a bee, take a second to remember the gift of raw honey. Its sweet taste is just the start of its appeal, as long as it comes it straight from the source - the hive. When your cold and allergy symptoms act up this season, try a spoonful of honey to keep you going.

Here are more ways to harness the healing power of raw honey:

Burns. Apply freely over burns. It cools, removes pain, serves as an antibiotic and aids in quick healing without scarring.

Cough Mixture. Combine 6 ounces of honey, 2 ounces of glycerin and the juice of two lemons. Bottle and cork firmly, and use as required.

Hyperactivity. Replace white sugar with honey. Honey provides the energy without the "spike" in blood sugar.

Insomnia. A small spoonful of honey in warm milk helps you fall asleep.

Migraine. Dissolve a spoonful of honey in half a glass of warm water. Sip at the first signs of a migraine, and if necessary, repeat after another 20 minutes.

Nasal Congestion. Place a spoonful of honey in a basin of water and inhale fumes after covering your head with a towel over the basin.

Fatigue. Dissolve a spoonful of honey in warm water as a natural stabilizer. Honey is primarily fructose and glucose, so it is quickly absorbed by the digestive system.

Facial Cleanser. Mix honey with an equal quantity of oatmeal and apply to the face for 30 minutes. The concoction works as a deep cleanser for acne and other unwanted blemishes.

Poor Digestion. Mix honey with an equal quantity of apple cider vinegar and dilute to taste with water. This also eases joint pain and promotes weight loss.

Osteoporosis. Research has shown that a teaspoon of honey per day aids calcium utilization and prevents osteoporosis.

Sore Throats. Let a teaspoon of honey melt in the back of your mouth and trickle down the throat. This reduces tissue inflammation.

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