Honey as a Dressing for Wounds

ECHO Inc.

(Based on an article in the October 1992 issue of Apis). New Zealand bee scientist, Dr. Peter Molan, says that “honey is used in many countries in the treatment of burns, blisters, bed sores and major wounds. Honey has long been used as a wound dressing and is probably the perfect substance for such a use. Not only is it antibiotic (killing almost all bacteria), it also keeps the wound from dehydrating. Almost all other wound dressings either keep the wound dry (avoiding infection, but leading to scarring), or moist (avoiding the severe effects of dehydration, but making a great medium for bacteria to grow).

"Honey is also better than man-made antibiotics, Dr. Molan contends, because such antibiotics actually slow down the rate of cell growth. The moisture-attracting nature of honey, on the other hand, pulls body fluids and nutrients to the wound surface where they help speed skin growth and healing.”

“All honey gives off hydrogen peroxide, a known antibiotic. The hydrogen peroxide is produced when the glucose in honey reacts with oxygen. The problem with peroxide as an antibiotic is that in large concentrations it breaks down in the presence of a common enzyme, producing the characteristic fizz we see when we put it on a cut. Because it is produced slowly in honey, at a low level, the peroxide doesn’t loose its effectiveness. Provided honey is kept away from light, the enzyme which breaks down the hydrogen peroxide won’t even activate.”

Dr. Molan has now discovered a second antibacterial property, present in some but not all New Zealand honey. It has been shown to be effective against *Helicobacter pylori*, which is thought to be the major cause of stomach ulcers. Tests will begin soon in which patients will be given a tablespoon of this honey five times a day. This substance also works against highly resistant bacteria such as the MSRA bacterium which is gaining a reputation for closing down hospital wards.

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