

7 Health Benefits of Manuka Honey, Based on Science

- Manuka honey is a type of honey native to New Zealand. It's produced by bees who pollinate the flower *Leptospermum scoparium*, commonly known as the manuka bush.
- Manuka honey's antibacterial properties are what set it apart from traditional honey.
- Methylglyoxal is its active ingredient and likely responsible for these antibacterial effects.
- Additionally, manuka honey has antiviral, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits. It has traditionally been used for wound healing, soothing sore throats, preventing tooth decay and improving digestive issues.

Here are 7 science-based health benefits of manuka honey:

1. Aid Wound Healing

Since ancient times, honey has been used to treat wounds, burns, sores and boils (1).

In 2007, manuka honey was approved by the US FDA as an option for wound treatment (2). Honey offers antibacterial and antioxidant properties, all while maintaining a moist wound environment and protective barrier, which prevents microbial infections in the wound. Multiple studies have shown that manuka honey can enhance wound healing, amplify the regeneration of tissue and even decrease pain in patients suffering from burns (3, 4).

For example, one two-week study investigated the effects of applying a manuka honey dressing on 40 people with non-healing wounds. The results showed that 88% of the wounds decreased in size. Moreover, it helped create an acidic wound environment, which favors wound healing (5).

What's more, manuka honey may help heal diabetic ulcers. A Saudi Arabian study found that manuka honey wound dressings, when used in combination with conventional wound treatment, healed diabetic ulcers more effectively than conventional treatment alone (6).

Additionally, a Greek study showed that manuka honey wound dressings reduced healing time and disinfected wounds in patients with diabetic foot ulcers (7).

Another study observed the effectiveness of manuka honey in healing eyelid wounds after surgery. They found all eyelid wounds healed well, regardless of whether the incisions were treated with manuka honey or vaseline. However, patients reported that scarring treated with manuka honey was less stiff and significantly less painful, compared to scarring treated with vaseline (8).

Lastly, manuka honey is effective at treating wound infections caused by antibiotic-resistant strains, such as *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) (9, 10). Hence, the regular topical application of manuka honey on wounds and infections may help prevent MRSA (11).

SUMMARY *Applied topically, manuka honey effectively treats burns, ulcers and non-healing wounds. It has also been shown to combat antibiotic-resistant strains of infections, such as MRSA.*

2. Promote Oral Health

According to the CDC, almost 50% of Americans have some form of periodontal disease. To avoid tooth decay and keep your gums healthy, it is important to minimize bad oral bacteria that can cause plaque formation. It's also important not to totally wipe out the good oral bacteria that is responsible for keeping your mouth healthy.

Studies have shown manuka honey attacks harmful oral bacteria associated with plaque formation, gum inflammation and tooth decay. Specifically, research has shown that manuka honey with a high antibacterial activity is effective at inhibiting the growth of harmful oral bacteria like *P. gingivalis* and *A. actinomycetemcomitans* (12, 13).

One study examined the effects of chewing or sucking on a honey chew on the reduction of plaque and gingivitis. The honey chew was made of manuka honey and similar to a chewy honey candy. After their three daily meals, participants were instructed to either chew or suck on the honey chew for 10 minutes or chew a sugar-free gum. The honey-chew group showed a significant reduction in plaque and gingival bleeding, compared to those who chewed the sugar-free gum (14).

The idea of consuming honey for good oral health may seem counterintuitive, as you have probably been told that consuming too many sweets can lead to cavities. However, unlike candy and refined sugar, manuka honey's potent antibacterial effects make it unlikely to contribute to cavities or tooth decay.

SUMMARY *Research shows manuka honey inhibits the growth of harmful oral bacteria that can cause gingivitis and tooth decay. Unlike refined sugar, it has not been shown to cause tooth decay.*

3. Soothe a Sore Throat

If you are suffering from a sore throat, manuka honey may help provide some relief. Its antiviral and antibacterial properties can reduce inflammation and attack the bacteria that cause pain.

Not only does manuka honey attack harmful bacteria, it also coats the inner lining of the throat for a soothing effect. A recent study in patients undergoing chemotherapy treatment for head and neck cancer observed the effects of consuming manuka honey on *Streptococcus mutans*, a type of bacteria responsible for sore throats. Interestingly, researchers found a significant decrease in *Streptococcus mutans* after they consumed manuka honey (15).

Moreover, manuka honey decreases harmful oral bacteria that causes mucositis, a common side effect of radiation and chemotherapy. Mucositis results in inflammation and painful ulcerations of the mucous membranes lining the esophagus and digestive tract (16).

For quite some time, various types of honey have been touted as natural cough suppressants. In fact, one study found honey was as effective as a common cough suppressant (17). Although manuka honey wasn't specifically used in this study, it's likely to be just as effective at suppressing coughs.

SUMMARY *Manuka honey can help treat sore throats. Research shows it attacks bacteria that causes soreness, especially in patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiation.*

4. Help Prevent Gastric Ulcers

Stomach ulcers are one of the most common illnesses affecting humans (18). They are sores that form on the lining of the stomach, causing stomach pain, nausea and bloating. *H. pylori* is a common type of bacteria that is responsible for the majority of gastric ulcers.

Research suggests that manuka honey may help treat gastric ulcers caused by *H. pylori*.

For example, a studies examined its effects on biopsies of gastric ulcers caused by *H. pylori*. The results were positive and implied that manuka honey is a useful antibacterial agent against *H. pylori* (19, 20).

Gastric ulcers can also be caused by excessive alcohol consumption. Yet, a study in rats showed that manuka honey helped prevent alcohol-induced gastric ulcers (18).

SUMMARY *Manuka honey's potent antibacterial effects may help treat gastric ulcers caused by H. pylori. It may also prevent alcohol-induced gastric ulcers.*

5. Improve Digestive Symptoms

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common digestive disorder. Its associated symptoms include constipation, diarrhea, abdominal pain and irregular bowel movements.

Interestingly, researchers have discovered that regularly consuming manuka honey may help decrease these symptoms. Manuka honey has been proven to improve antioxidant status and reduce inflammation in rats with both IBS and ulcerative colitis, a type of inflammatory bowel disease (21). It has also been shown to attack strains of *Clostridium difficile*.

Clostridium difficile, often called *C. diff*, is a type of bacterial infection that causes severe diarrhea and inflammation of the bowel. *C. diff* is commonly treated with antibiotics. However, a recent study observed the effectiveness of manuka honey on *C. diff* strains. Manuka honey killed *C. diff* cells, making it a possibly effective treatment (22).

It is important to note that the above studies observed manuka honey's influence on bacterial infections in rat and test-tube studies. Further research is needed to come to a full conclusion regarding its influence on bacterial infections of the bowel.

SUMMARY *Manuka honey may decrease inflammation in individuals with IBS. It may also be effective at attacking C. difficile.*

6. May Treat Symptoms of Cystic Fibrosis

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited disorder that damages the lungs and can also affect the digestive system and other organs. It affects the cells that produce mucus, causing mucus to be abnormally thick and sticky. This thick mucus clogs airways and ducts, making it difficult to breathe. Unfortunately, upper respiratory infections are quite common in people with cystic fibrosis.

Manuka honey has been shown to fight bacteria that cause upper respiratory infections. *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Burkholderia spp.* are two common bacteria that can cause serious upper respiratory infections, especially in vulnerable populations. One study observed the effectiveness of manuka honey against these bacteria in

people with cystic fibrosis. Results indicated that it inhibits their growth and works in conjunction with antibiotic treatment (23). Therefore, researchers concluded that manuka honey may play an important role in treating upper respiratory infections, especially in those with cystic fibrosis.

SUMMARY *Manuka honey has been shown to attack harmful bacteria that cause upper respiratory infections in individuals with cystic fibrosis, but further studies are needed.*

7. Treat Acne

Manuka honey can improve your skin's appearance. It can balance your skin's pH level and help slough away dead cell debris to keep your skin clean. Its anti-inflammatory effect can decrease local inflammation caused by acne. As an antibacterial, Manuka honey leaves fewer bacteria to infect pores and cause acne. This honey can heal existing pimples, as well. The low pH speeds up the healing of acne. (24)

Because it contains hydrogen peroxide and compounds like methylglyoxal, Manuka honey is effective in killing pathogens, including antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Keeping the skin bacteria-free speeds up the healing process.

This honey is also a great emollient, meaning it softens the skin. Its high concentration of sugars can keep a wound or burn area moist. This can also accelerate healing.

What's more, Manuka honey reduces inflammation and pain at the wound site. It can also help with skin problems, such as psoriasis and dandruff.

SUMMARY *Manuka honey's ability to treat acne appear favorable given its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.*

Is Manuka Honey Safe?

For most people, manuka honey is safe to consume.

However, some people should consult a doctor before using it, including:

- **People with diabetes.** All types of honey are high in natural sugar. Therefore, consuming manuka honey may affect blood sugar levels.
- **Those allergic to honey or bees.** Those allergic to other types of honey or bees may have an allergic reaction after ingesting or applying manuka honey.
- **Infants.** The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend giving honey to babies younger than one due to the risk of infant botulism, a type of foodborne illness.

SUMMARY *Manuka honey is safe to consume for the majority of people over the age of one. Nevertheless, people with diabetes and those allergic to bees or other types of honey should talk to their healthcare provider before using it.*

The Bottom Line

- Manuka honey is a unique type of honey.
- Its most notable attribute is its effect on wound management and healing.
- Manuka honey also has antibacterial, antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties that may help treat numerous ailments, including irritable bowel syndrome, gastric ulcers, periodontal disease and upper respiratory infections.
- All things considered, manuka honey is likely an effective treatment strategy that may accelerate the healing process when used in conjunction with more conventional therapies.

Information taken from online article by Kaitlyn Berkheiser, March 29, 2018 https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/manuka-honey-uses-benefits#TOC_TITLE_HDR_6



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