

Honey, Part 2

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Editor's note: Part 1 of this article appeared in the Feb. 26 issue.

Honey and Herpes: Worth a Look

It is estimated that one-third of the world's population has been affected by the herpes simplex virus.¹ Honey has a long history in folk medicine as being a cure for many conditions, especially those involving the skin. As a topical agent, honey has accelerated wound healing and reduced scar formation following surgery.² Dandruff and seborrheic dermatitis have also been successfully treated by the author of that study,³ who states that, when combined with olive oil and beeswax, honey has been effective in treating such chronic skin conditions as eczema, psoriasis and urticaria.⁴

The Study

Sixteen volunteers (eight women and eight men) with a history of labial and genital herpes outbreaks volunteered for this study.⁵ Annually, the men averaged six outbreaks of genital herpes and the women averaged five outbreaks of labial herpes. The length of resolution without intervention ranged from 7 to 12 days in this small sample. (Population averages state that the time to healing without treatment is 10 days.) Half of the 16 volunteers were asked to use honey on their next outbreak; the other half used 5-percent Acyclovir cream. They then employed the opposite intervention on their following outbreaks. Therapy was applied as follows: Acyclovir cream was rubbed on the lesions six times per day. Gauze soaked in honey was placed on the lesions for 15 minutes, four times a day. All subjects reported to the doctor within 24 hours of the onset of their outbreak. They were monitored daily and their lesions were classified as macula, papule, vesicle, pustule, ulcer, crust, or healed.

Results

	Days of Attack		Days of Pain		Days to Resolution	
Location:	Genital	Labial	Genital	Labial	Genital	Labial
Honey	3.1±1.5	3.4±1.5	1.1±0.9	1±0.8	3.7±1.9	2.6±1
Acyclovir	5.7±1	5.3±1.2	2.3±0.8	2.6±1	6.3±1.4	5.9±1.6

Discussion

Although this study is very impressive, it must be noted that it was not blinded. It also contained only 16 subjects and should be validated with a larger sample size. The researchers were not exactly sure why the honey worked so well, but they had some theories, the first of which is that honey has been shown to reduce two-series prostaglandins,⁶ which can negatively affect the immune system by

inhibiting T-cell function.⁷

The other possible mechanism of action, either alone or in concert with what was described above, is honey's affect on nitric oxide (NO). Honey contains nitric oxide metabolites.⁸ Honey can also elevate nitric oxide in body fluids.^{9,10} Nitric oxide may retard or prevent replication of some viruses, according to the author.⁵

Maybe That's Why They Call It Honey

Nitric oxide has been in the news lately. I remember learning years ago that the amino acid arginine seemed to help the immune response during times of viral overload. Later, it was discovered that arginine was a precursor to endothelium-derived relaxing factor (EDRF), a group of substances, one of which was later determined to be NO. If NO is indeed antiviral, this would not only explain why honey helped against herpes, but also why arginine has been used as a natural treatment for viruses.

A few years ago, when researchers were testing a drug for hypertension (sildenafil citrate), male subjects noticed a rather profound side-effect. If their minds wandered to thoughts of the opposite gender, a marked increase in blood flow to a certain anatomical region was clearly noticed. It turns out this drug increases NO, which resulted in relaxation of the corpus cavernosum. The trade name for this drug is [Viagra](#). Could it be that honey got its name for something other than its taste?

References

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