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Cancer Center

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FOR THE MEDIA

Manuka honey may help prevent infections and promote wound healing when used externally.

Manuka honey can help fight bacterial infections and has been used in dressings to promote wound healing. Methylglyoxal, a major compound in this honey, is thought to be responsible for these effects. In vitro and animal studies also suggest anti-inflammatory and anti-ulcer properties. Small studies in humans suggest its benefits against gingivitis and inflamed nasal sinuses. However, it has not been found to be effective in reducing cancer treatment-related side effects such as inflammation or sores in the mouth or throat. Larger studies are needed.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Wound dressings
Small studies suggest the value of manuka honey in wound healing.
- Antibiotics
Topical use of manuka honey was shown to be effective against bacteria.

- Diabetes
Clinical trials are lacking. Excessive use of honey may increase in blood sugar levels.
- Gastrointestinal tract problems
Clinical trials have not been able to confirm if manuka honey can improve beneficial bacteria in the gut.
- Infections
Several case studies have described manuka honey as being effective to treat wounds that did not respond to standard treatment.
- Cancer prevention/treatment
Clinical trials are lacking.
- Radiation side effects
Clinical trials did not find any benefit with manuka honey for either radiation-induced oral mucositis or esophagitis, but one study found that it reduced bacterial infections.
- Oral health
One small study suggests using manuka honey may help reduce buildup of plaque and gingivitis. Large-scale studies are needed.

What are the side effects?

- The sugar content in manuka honey may raise the blood glucose level in those with diabetes.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

Although manuka honey has antibacterial effects, patients should not self-medicate with honey products. Any infection should be examined by a physician or a qualified healthcare professional for proper care. If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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