



HEALING HONEY HELPS PATIENTS SURVIVE CHEMO

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HONEY has long been used to soothe sore throats, heal wounds and treat stomach complaints but could it help cancer patients with treatment for chemotherapy? BARBARA LANTIN investigates.

HEALING: Honey can improve quality of life

When Robert Brunt began treatment for cancer of the oesophagus, he expected to experience some very unpleasant side effects from his chemotherapy.

The medical team told him that he would probably lose all his hair and might also suffer mouth ulcers, stomach problems and exhaustion. If the treatment caused his blood count to fall too low – a common problem – this could delay his next treatment cycle.

To the surprise and delight of Robert and his doctors, none of this has happened. “I have lost a little hair but that is growing back,” says Robert, 48, a maintenance engineer at Plymouth University, who has two teenage daughters. “I sometimes feel tired and a bit sick but apart from that I have had no side effects at all.

“My blood counts have always been high. Not only have I never had to delay any of my chemotherapy but I offered to have two extra cycles – eight in all – because I felt so well. The tumour has now shrunk to virtually nothing. Everyone is surprised at how well I have done.”

Robert believes that he has sailed through his treatment without side effects thanks to what is probably the world’s most expensive honey. Life Mel, which sells for around £40 for a jar, has been shown to boost the production of red and white blood cells, haemoglobin and blood platelets in people undergoing chemotherapy. The manufacturers emphasise the product is not a cancer cure.

In one small trial, 40 per cent of cancer patients known to be at risk of neutropenia – a very low blood count, which can make patients susceptible to serious infection – had no further episodes of the condition after taking two teaspoons of Life Mel a day during chemotherapy.

One third said their quality of life had improved while taking the honey, which is made in Israel and comes from bees fed on a combination of medicinal herbs, including ginseng, echinacea and lemon balm. It was developed by a microbiologist who noticed that beekeepers and their families stayed healthy during a cholera outbreak.

TV medic Dr Chris Steele was sufficiently impressed by the trial results to put two of his cancer patients on Life Mel.

“They have started responding to their chemotherapy very quickly,” he says. “If the honey stops the white cell count dropping it means people can have chemotherapy for longer or at higher doses.”

Honey has been used medicinally for more than 2,000 years and is known to have antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Stomach upsets, eye problems, skin infections and burns are among the conditions that have been treated. Its healing properties are thought to come from enzymes that release gluconic acid and hydrogen peroxide.

Medi-honey, made up of Manuka and jellybush honeys from Australia and New Zealand, is licensed in Europe, the US and Australia for treating wounds and is used in hospitals worldwide.

It has been shown in studies to eradicate hundreds of bacterial strains including antibiotic-resistant MRSA.

One clinical trial showed that Medihoney is as effective as an antiseptic gel at preventing infections caused by catheters: at least one German hospital uses medical honey on all entry sites of catheters that show any sign of inflammation. Another study concluded that patients should ask their doctors to apply honey to their wounds after surgery.

A recent report from the Children’s Hospital Medical Centre in Bonn described how honey had helped heal an infected surgical wound in a newborn baby. After three weeks’ treatment with honey dressings, the wound was clear of infection and the baby was discharged.

“As well as rapidly clearing infection, honey has been shown to have several other therapeutic actions that are of great benefit,” says Peter Molan, professor of biological sciences at the University of Waikato, New Zealand.

“It rapidly causes dead tissue to lift off messy wounds, soothes inflammation and decreases swelling and pain and actively stimulates the healing process, so that rapid healing occurs and skin grafting is not needed.”

US research published last month showed that a teaspoon of buckwheat honey was more effective at soothing children’s coughs than dextromethorphan, the active ingredient in many cough remedies.

“There is general acceptance that honey is a respectable therapeutic agent and there is a rapidly increasing uptake of its usage by clinicians as well as the public,” says Dr Molan.



The world's most expensive honey helped Robert through chemotherapy

Side effects from honey are few compared with pharmaceutical drugs although some people have complained that honey on wounds causes a stinging sensation. In others it can provoke an allergic reaction, so it is not advised for anybody with a known allergy to bee stings or pollen.



Only medical grade honey should be used for wound treatment: other varieties have not been sterilised or irradiated to kill clostridium botulinum spores, sometimes found in honey, which can be toxic if they enter a wound.

** Life Mel www.lifemel.co.uk/ 020 7247 5497;
Medihoney www.medihoney.com/0800 071 3912;
Manukacare gel for minor wounds; www.comvita.co.uk/01753 701617.



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To find out more about the benefits of LifeMel Honey go to www.LifeMelUSA.com.