

HONEY:

It's a Matter of Health and Taste



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You probably know that bees make honey. It's also likely that you've tasted honey and found it to be delicious. But do you know what it really is?

Bees make honey by gathering nectar from plants. Nectar is a sweet liquid that is produced by flowering plants. They produce it in the hope that bees, wasps, and other insects will land on the flower, gather nectar, and inadvertently brush up against the pollen. As they fly from plant to plant the pollen that's already collected on their body will rub off on other plants. The pollen initiates a fertilization process.

Honey bees actually have a little structure on their back legs called a Pollen Basket. This is where the pollen collects and how it is transferred to the stigma of other flowers. Bees use the nectar they gather for nutrition. They also use it to make honey.

What is Honey, Really?

Honey is made when the nectar combines with enzymes in the bee's saliva. They deposit the material into the cells of the hive where they store it for later. Interestingly, the buzzing of their little wings is what dries the honey out enough that it is ready to eat.

So honey is nothing more than enzymes from a bee's mouth mixed with nectar which is then reduced to the pleasant sticky substance we know and love by using their wings to evaporate some of the water.

Bee keepers, then collect the honeycombs, scrape off the wax caps the bees place on top of each cell, and extract the honey. The flavor of the honey is determined by the flowers that the bee gathers the nectar from. For example, if a bee gathers nectar from an orange blossom then the nectar will taste a bit like oranges. If it gathers nectar from a clover field then you'll taste clover in your honey.

There are many fun and different varieties of honey including:

- Alfalfa
- Blueberry
- Avocado
- Buckwheat
- Eucalyptus
- Sage
- Sourwood
- Tulip Poplar
- Wildflower



- And of course there are honey blends

Honey also differs in both color and texture as well. The darker the color, the more flavorful. Textures are often described as:

- Liquid Honey – This is created by placing the honey comb in an extractor which then spins the honey out of the cells.
- Creamed Honey- Is made by blending granulated honey with liquid honey. It's stored at a cool temp to allow it to harden.
- Chunk Honey – Is a honey comb in a jar with honey poured around it.

You can find all three types of honey in your local supermarket, however the most abundant and easy to use is generally the liquid honey. Now that you know everything there is to know about what honey is and where it comes from, let's take a look at the numerous benefits honey provides.

Health Benefits of Eating Honey

You know that there are many forms of sugar. You can get sugar from sugar beets, sugar cane, and from corn in the form of corn syrup. We also use maple syrup, molasses, and manufactured sweeteners to flavor our foods. And new sugars have shown up on marketplace shelves. There's Stevia and Agave made from plants as well as coconut sugar which is a sugar produced from the sap of flower buds of the coconut palm.



None of these sugars has the same health and nutrition properties that honey has. According to the [National Nutritional Database](#), honey has:

- 64 calories in one tablespoon
- protein
- calcium
- Iron
- phosphorous
- potassium
- sodium
- zinc
- vitamin C
- Thiamin
- Riboflavin
- Niacin
- Vitamin B-6

Honey doesn't have any fat or cholesterol. In addition to having a significant number of nutrients and minerals, honey has other health and healing properties.

A Natural Source of Fast Energy

Your body turns food into glucose which it then uses to create ATP for energy. Honey is already broken down to a very basic level which means that your body can use it almost at once. It doesn't have to go through a lengthy digestion process, like a sandwich might, to become energy for your body. In fact, your body can begin converting honey immediately. This means it's a fast source of fuel, which can be particularly important if you exercise.

Honey is a fantastic pre or post workout snack and many endurance athletes consume honey during their workout to provided sustained energy. There are now many sports nutrition products made from honey because it is so easy for your body to manage and healthy too.

Honey has a low glycemic index, which means it doesn't cause a spike in your blood sugar levels. This helps manage your insulin response and give you energy without the sugar rush associated with most sweeteners. Additionally, honey has been shown to possess some healing properties.

Immunity Booster

Hospitals in Israel studied the effects of honey on the immune system. They found that it was effective in decreasing the occurrence of acute febrile neutropenia in 64% of their patients. Acute Febrile Neutropenia is when a high fever reduces a person's white blood cell count.

In the same study honey also stabilized hemoglobin levels and improved the quality of life in 32% of the cancer patients involved in the study.

Anti-Inflammatory and Anti-Bacterial

Honey also has many healing properties. It is both an anti-inflammatory and an anti-bacterial. It's commonly used to alleviate sore throats. As well, you can use it as a cough suppressant instead of cough medicine. A spoonful of honey will coat the throat and reduce pain and soreness.

As well, a 2007 study by the [Penn State College of Medicine](#), found that honey offers a safe and effective alternative to children's cough medicine. They studied the effects of buckwheat honey given before bedtime and found that it provided better relief of nighttime cough and sleep difficulty in children than no treatment or dextromethorphan (DM), a cough suppressant found in many over-the-counter cold medications. And honey, when given to children over the age of one, has no harmful side effects unlike Dextromethorphan.

"Honey did a better job reducing the severity, frequency and bothersome nature of nighttime cough from upper respiratory infection than DM or no treatment. Honey also

showed a positive effect on the sleep quality of both the coughing child and the child's parents. DM was not significantly better at alleviating symptoms than no treatment."

Honey is a powerful and soothing antioxidant and antimicrobial. It is often used to treat cold symptoms and as a source of fast energy. While honey is exceptional for your nutritional wellness, it can also be used in a number of beauty and first aid treatments.

Using Honey for Health & Beauty

In addition to treating colds, flus, coughs and sore throats, honey makes a wonderful first aid ointment as well as a beauty aid. Topically, it acts as a humectant. That means that it attracts and preserves water. It's also an antibacterial and an antifungal.

Keeping honey in your first aid kit or cabinet can be extremely useful. First, honey can be used to treat diarrhea, stomach upset, and even to help kill harmful bacteria in the gut which may cause food poisoning. Specifically, it is used to treat stomach ulcers caused by *H. pylori* bacteria.

Burns and Sunburn Treatment

You can apply honey directly to a burn including a sunburn. It helps reduce pain and decrease the time it takes to heal. In fact, according to [WebMD](#), honey was used by the ancient Greek physician Dioscorides in 50 A.D. for sunburn and infected wounds. And the healing properties of honey are mentioned in many religious texts including the Bible, the Koran, and Torah.

A study in India looked at the wound healing effects of honey compared to their conventional treatment using silver sulfadiazine. They tested the two on patients with first degree burns. After one week of treatment, 91% of honey treated burns were infection free compared with only 7% who received the conventional treatment. And the honey treated group's burns healed more quickly.

Wound Healing



You can apply honey directly to a wound or to coat a dressing before wrapping a wound. Wounds include ulcers, cuts, abrasions, and even places where you've had an incision or skin was taken for grafting. Clinical trials have shown that the antiseptic properties of honey combined with the humectant properties provide an effective means to heal wounds of all types.

The enzymes in honey are almost as powerful as hydrogen peroxide as an antiseptic. It helps clean the wound, reduce infection, reduce pain and decrease the amount of time it takes to heal.



Honey also stops infection and provides a natural barrier that prevents any bacteria from entering. The humectant properties keep the wound moist which helps the healing process.

In addition to providing a means of natural first aid, wound and burn care, and to solve digestive problems, honey is also a natural skin care ingredient.

Honey for Your Skin

Remember that honey is a humectant? That means it attracts and preserves water. When placed on your skin it aids in hydration and helps keep your skin moist and fresh. It also has antibacterial properties which makes it an exceptional product for acne prone skin.

Honey Scrubs

You can make your own honey scrub by blending apricot shells with honey. You'll slough away dead skin and leave your body feeling smooth and soft. Here's an easy recipe you can use to make your own honey scrub.



- Add 1 teaspoon pure honey to 1/4 cup light olive oil.
- Blend with 1 cup sugar in the raw. Mix in 2 teaspoon fresh lemon, lime, or orange zest.
- Blend until well mixed, then store in a jar.

Use a tablespoon on your body. Scrub it into your skin using your hand or a soft washcloth. Rinse and towel off.

Soap and Cleanser

Many are surprised when they try using natural honey as the primary step in their daily cleansing routine. Raw honey works best and can be found in natural food stores or purchase online. It is preferred because it hasn't been processed and still contains a high degree of the natural elements.

Simply place a teaspoon or so of honey onto your damp hands, rub into your face like you would soap. Let sit for a minute then rinse and dry. The antibacterial properties will help cleanse your pores, reduce acne, and leave your skin feeling soft and clean.

You can also make your own honey cleansers at home. Here are a few recipes to try.



Baking Soda & Honey Cleanser - Combine one tablespoon of honey with one teaspoon of baking soda in a small dish. Pour the mixture onto damp hands and massage gently onto your face. Let it sit for a minute and then rinse.

Honey & Cinnamon Cleanser – This cleanser is for acne prone skin. Combine half a teaspoon of true cinnamon powder, a tablespoon of fresh squeezed lemon juice and a teaspoon of raw honey. Pour the mixture onto damp hands and massage into your face – avoiding your eyes. Let sit for a minute, rinse and dry.

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Washing your face every day with honey is just the beginning. If you want to take extra good care of your complexion, consider making or buying a honey mask. A weekly honey mask can do wonders for your skin.

Honey Masks

Honey masks are placed on the skin to allow the ingredients to work their magic. Honey masks can remove impurities, reduce the look of your pores, and fight inflammation. You'll experience not only clearer and softer skin but you may also notice a reduction in puffy eyes and fine lines around your mouth and eyes. Sounds great, right?

Here are a few DIY Honey Masks you can make at home.

Honey Yogurt Mask - Combine two parts plain yogurt – Greek yogurt works well for this recipe – one part honey in a small bowl. A good amount is a quarter cup of yogurt to an eighth of a cup of honey.

With clean hands, massage the mask into your face. Let it sit for fifteen minutes. Rinse with warm water and pat dry.

Pumpkin Honey Mask - Pumpkin is rich in fruit acids which are excellent for exfoliating your skin and causing it to produce collagen. It's best if you use real pumpkin for this recipe, not canned



pumpkin. Cut the flesh of a pumpkin and remove the skin, seeds, and the slimy bits.

Boil the pumpkin chunks until they're fork tender. Depending on the size of your chunks this can take 20 to 30 minutes. Put the pumpkin into a food processor or blender and puree.

Combine two teaspoons of your pumpkin puree with a teaspoon of honey and half a teaspoon of cream or whole milk. You can use yogurt too. With clean hands apply it to your face and let it dry for 20 minutes. Rinse with warm water and pat dry.

Apple & Honey – Combine one cored apple, leave the peel on, with a tablespoon of honey into your food processor or blender. Pulse until smooth. You can store the mixture in a small mason jar in the refrigerator. When you want to use it on your face, apply it to your skin and let it sit for fifteen minutes. Rinse, pat dry and enjoy your glowing complexion. The apple has natural antioxidants and fruit acids that both clear away dead skin and leave your face feeling smooth and fresh.

You can also purchase many natural and organic cleansers, masks, and skin care products made with honey in your local natural stores or online. If you're making your own products, look for organic raw honey as the main ingredient. This is the best choice for both first aid treatments as well as skin care.

Did you know that honey not only helps improve your health and wellbeing it also helps benefit the environment? When you use honey as a staple in your diet and everyday life, you're contributing to the improvement of the earth.



How Honey Helps the Environment

There are essentially two main ways that honey makes a difference in the world around us. The first is that honey is a low emission crop. Actually, it takes very little energy or resources to make honey. You simply have to extract the honeycomb from the hive and enjoy.

The biggest environmental cost of honey is the cost of fuel and transportation to get the

honey from the hive to the manufacturer to the distributor to your home. You can help eliminate this by simply buying local honey.

When you buy local honey you'll immediately notice one very important thing – it tastes magnificent. There's something truly special about fresh honey and local honey is generally extremely fresh. It hasn't had to travel for days and weeks to get to your shelf.

Bees are essential to our environment.

What helps us function as a society are the bees that make honey. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, bees pollinate 80 percent of our flowering crops. These crops include not only about a third of everything we eat but also crops like cotton and soybeans. A study conducted by Cornell University study estimated that honeybees annually pollinate \$14 billion worth of seeds and crops in the U.S. Without them the economy would suffer along with the environment. And you'd be without your favorite fruits and vegetables.

We're talking about foods that you probably don't want to do without including:

- Apples
- Berries – strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and many more
- Broccoli
- Nuts - Almonds
- Asparagus
- Cherries
- Cucumbers
- Alfalfa
- Oranges
- Peaches
- Tangerines

Now you might not immediately care if alfalfa is available but it's a primary component of feed for many beef and dairy cows.

The Honey Bee Population is Dwindling

A virus is wiping out the honeybee population and scientists just aren't sure what is causing the virus or how to treat it. They do know that action is required and there are ways you can help. The first is to buy locally produced honey. This helps keep local beekeepers in business so the bees have a chance of surviving in your community.

You can also plant a garden with bee friendly plants or consider becoming a beekeeper yourself. Don't buy honey from foreign countries. The honey may contain bacteria that is harmful to native bees. And finally, consider placing a small beehive in your garden to give them a safe place to live. And don't kill honeybees when you see them. Learn to identify these amazing creatures so you know one when you see it.



One of the best ways to enjoy the honey that the wonderful honeybee makes is to use it in your recipes. You can use honey in a number of interesting and delicious ways – from mixed drinks to salad dressings, honey is versatile and great for you.

Honey Recipes

Honey is easy to cook with. It doesn't need to be refrigerated and if it crystallizes, you can simply warm it up before you use it. It's a delicious addition to a peanut butter sandwich and it's amazing on top of pancakes. But honey is more than something you add to pancakes or sandwiches, it can be the premier ingredient in a recipe.

If you want to add more honey into your daily diet, enjoy the following easy to make recipes.

Honey and Oil Vinaigrette

- 1/3 cup - honey
- 1/4 cup - balsamic vinegar
- 3 Tablespoons - soy sauce
- 2 cloves - garlic, coarsely chopped
- 1/3 cup - olive oil

Combine the ingredients in a blender and pulse until smooth. Pour over your favorite salad greens and enjoy. You can keep this dressing in your refrigerator for a week.

Honey Glazed Acorn Squash

- 2 - acorn squash
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon - water
- 1/4 cup – honey (Try sage honey for a nice flavor)
- 1/2 teaspoon - kosher salt



For Honey Butter:

- 1/2 cup - unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup - honey
- Sea salt to taste

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Cut the squash in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds. Place a cup of water in the bottom of a baking dish. Arrange squash with pulp facing up.

Combine honey, salt, and a tablespoon of water, in a small bowl. Brush the top of the squash. Cover pan with foil and bake for thirty minutes.

Make the honey butter while the squash is baking. In a small sauce pan melt the butter and cook until it begins to brown. Add the honey and salt. Set aside to cool. Remove the foil from the squash and bake for another 15 minutes or until fork tender and golden brown. Serve the squash with a spoon of the honey butter on top and a sprinkle of sea salt.

Spicy Honey Chicken Thighs

- ¼ cup - honey
- 1 - orange, zester
- 2 tablespoons - orange juice, fresh squeezed
- 1 tablespoon - extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon - Chinese five-spice powder
- 2 teaspoons - chopped garlic
- 2 teaspoons - kosher salt
- 4 (5-ounce) - chicken thighs, bone-in, skin-on

Combine the first seven ingredients into a bowl or bag and add the chicken thighs. Let marinate for at least an hour. Heat a Sautee pan or cast iron skillet on medium high heat, add your olive oil. When the oil is hot, add your chicken thighs skin side down. Cook for three to five minutes, flip and cook for another fifteen minutes or until done. Discard the marinade.

Honey Bee Cocktail

- 2 oz. Jamaican dark rum
- 1/4 oz. honey
- 1/2 oz. lemon juice

Pour the rum, honey and lemon juice into a chilled cocktail shaker half-filled with ice cubes. Shake well, strain into a cocktail glass, and enjoy.

Honey Lemonade

If you prefer a non-alcoholic beverage try this delicious treat.

- 1 cup fresh squeezed lemon juice
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/4 cup peeled fresh ginger slices
- Fresh mint sprigs
- 2 cups water
- 4 cups ice cubes

Combine the lemon juice, honey, ginger, and one chopped sprig of mint in a large pitcher and stir, pressing the mint and ginger to release flavor. Add the water and stir until the honey dissolves, then add the ice and pour into glasses. Garnish each glass with a sprig of mint for a festive look.

There's no end to what you can make with honey. From barbecue sauce to baklava, honey is a time tested food ingredient. Find a few favorite recipes, purchase a variety of honey found at your specialty food market, and enjoy the flavor and health benefits honey can provide.

Wrapping Up

It seems honey has been around since the beginning of recorded time. Ancient civilizations touted the sweet substance for its healing powers. Just about every culture on our planet uses honey in a variety of recipes. You can use honey to soothe a sore throat, prevent a burn from getting infected, and for treating an upset stomach.

Honey can be part of your cocktail hour or your dessert. It can be served with sweet dishes or savory delights.

Local honey is great for the environment and for your local economy. The less honey has to travel the fewer carbon emissions. Additionally, local honey means local bees and as previously discussed local bee's impact crops and the food that you enjoy every day.





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