Honey

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Overview

Honey is a sweet fluid made by honeybees using the nectar of flowering plants. There are about 320 different varieties of honey, which vary in color, odor and flavor. Honey contains mostly sugar, as well as a mix of amino acids, vitamins, minerals, iron, zinc and antioxidants. In addition to its use as a natural sweetener, honey is used as an anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and antibacterial agent. People commonly use honey orally to treat coughs and topically to treat burns and promote wound healing.

Evidence

Research on honey for specific conditions includes:

- **Cardiovascular disease.** Antioxidants in honey might be associated with reduced risk of heart disease.
- **Cough.** Studies suggest that eucalyptus honey, citrus honey and labiatae honey can act as a reliable cough suppressant for some people with upper respiratory infections and acute nighttime cough.
• **Gastrointestinal disease.** Evidence suggests honey might help relieve gastrointestinal tract conditions such as diarrhea associated with gastroenteritis. Honey might also be effective as part of oral rehydration therapy.

• **Neurological disease.** Studies suggest that honey might offer antidepressant, anticonvulsant and anti-anxiety benefits. In some studies, honey has been shown to help prevent memory disorders.

• **Wound care.** Topical use of medical-grade honey has been shown to promote wound healing, particularly in burns.

Results might vary because there are no standardized methods for producing honey or verifying its quality.

**Our take**

**Generally safe**

Honey is generally safe in adults and children older than age 1. It might be helpful in treating burns, coughs and possibly other conditions.

**Safety and side effects**

Honey is likely safe for use as a natural sweetener, cough suppressant, and topical product for minor sores and wounds.

Avoid giving honey — even a tiny taste — to babies under the age of 1 year. Honey can cause a rare but serious gastrointestinal condition (infant botulism) caused by exposure to Clostridium botulinum spores. Bacteria from the spores can grow and multiply in a baby's intestines, producing a dangerous toxin.

Some people are sensitive or allergic to specific components in honey, particularly bee pollen. Although rare, bee pollen allergies can cause serious, and sometimes fatal, adverse reactions. Signs and symptoms of a reaction include:

- Wheezing and other asthmatic symptoms
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Weakness
- Excessive perspiration
- Fainting
- Irregular heart rhythms (arrhythmias)
- Stinging after topical application

Honey might affect blood sugar levels.

**Interactions**

There's currently no evidence to show how honey might interact with other drugs.