



In her regular monthly column, health writer and broadcaster **GILL COX** shares her knowledge and beliefs in integrated medicine



# Busy bees

**Honey's use as a medicine is ancient history – Aristotle recommended it for wounds back in 350BC. Now new research proves it can beat modern drugs**

**T**here was a time when honey was routinely used to help heal wounds and battle bacteria. Once antibiotics became the 'cure-all' it fell out of favour, but in the last few decades medics have begun taking it seriously again.

Two particular honeys are now attracting medical research – Manuka and Life Mel.

Manuka honey comes from New Zealand, specifically from bees feeding from a native wild bush – *Leptospermum scoparium*, also known as Manuka, or Tea Tree. All honeys contain antiseptic hydrogen peroxide to some degree (produced from an enzyme bees add to the nectar), but this specific ingredient produces antibacterial properties far superior to other honeys, and clinical studies prove it.

In the UK some hospitals – like Manchester Royal Infirmary – routinely use Manuka for dressing wounds. Mouth cancer patients at Manchester's Christie Hospital have been treated with

bandages soaked in Manuka honey to reduce the risk of contracting the superbug MRSA, and lessen swelling of post-surgical wounds.

Studies at Liverpool's Aintree Hospital and the University of Wales Institute confirmed Manuka honey can inhibit growth of the antibiotic-resistant bacteria that's made many of us (rightly) nervous of surgery. Another study published in the *European Journal of Medical Research* found that when treating infected Caesarean or hysterectomy wounds, Manuka had an 85% success rate – compared to the 50% for established treatments. And if you know anyone with a hard-to-heal

leg ulcer, do tell them about Manuka. Countless patients, often after years of suffering, happily describe it as a 'miracle cure'. But while we've become used to tabloid-hailed 'miracle cures' later turning out to have nasty side effects – not so with this natural wonder.

However, you do need to know your Manukas. Not all honey called Manuka is potent enough for therapeutic use. So, Professor Peter Molan MBE, a biochemist leading the Honey Research Unit at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, has worked out a Unique Manuka Factor (UMF) rating. A UMF of 10 or more is suitable for therapeutic medical use, and is referred to as 'active'. Successful clinical trials often use Manuka with a UMF of 12.

For external use – to apply directly to wounds – gamma-irradiated Manuka (in a tube) retains the healing properties, but the risk of introducing any potentially infective agent is eliminated. As well as healing nasty wounds, Manuka can

**Both Manuka and Life Mel honey have been found to have healing properties**



## Ease statin muscle pain

■ Statin medication is terrific for lowering cholesterol, but many users find they suffer side effects such as muscle pain. Researchers at Stony Brook University, New York, have found taking 100mg daily of Coenzyme Q10 (Co Q10) can reduce such pain by 40%.



Israel (published in *Medical Oncology*, 2006), suggests Life Mel honey may significantly reduce the incidence of neutropenia and chemo-induced anaemia – with no side effects.

The 30 trial patients were given a spoonful of honey on an empty stomach in the morning. Other patients who've tried the honey swear by taking two teaspoonfuls a day – including a 76-year-old former Canadian family doctor who's used it, successfully, to treat leukaemia induced by radiation therapy for another cancer.

The fact that honey carries properties from plants bees feed on sits comfortably with the theory that hayfever sufferers can desensitise themselves by eating locally produced honey. There's no clinical proof, and you need to start dosing well before your hayfever season, but it can't do any harm. ■

also be used to treat acne, eczema, fungal infections, and burns.

For internal use – a teaspoonful three times daily may ease digestive problems such as irritable bowel syndrome, stomach ulcers, acid reflux and heartburn. It can be used diluted as a mouthwash, or on gums to fight gum disease.

The other super-honey available is Life Mel honey, specifically created by a Russian microbiologist, Dr Alexander Goroshit, now working in Israel. His curiosity was initially pricked by the fact that beekeepers' families in a small Russian town remained healthy,

despite a local cholera epidemic. His subsequent research proved that the food bees consume affects their honey's properties. So he set about producing honey from bees fed a blend of 17 key medicinal herbs, which appear to work directly on the immune system. Patients undergoing chemotherapy may find this of particular benefit.

Chemotherapy can cause neutropenia – a dangerously low count of infection-busting white cells (neutrophils) – and further life-saving treatment may be delayed because of it. A small study by oncologists at Sieff Hospital in