

Propolis – defence the best form of attack

Article provided by Frances Ive

Bees and their hive colonies are another wonder of evolution or creation depending which side of the fence you sit. We know about honey and its nutritional and immune boosting properties but comparatively few people know about the other gift from the hive – propolis. For 45 million years bees have protected their hives from infection and invasion with this sticky, resinous substance. But propolis needs to take its rightful place as an effective antimicrobial agent and another product for the medicine cabinet.

As an antibacterial, antibiotic and antiseptic substance, propolis is widely used as a herbal medicine to treat colds, flu, sore throats and generally boost the immune system.

Literally meaning ‘before city’ propolis can be translated from Greek as ‘defender of the city’ and as a consequence bee hives are the most sterile environments you can find. Before the queen lays her eggs the workers line the cell with propolis to create a sterile environment in which she can hatch them. They also polish the surface of the hive with propolis which protects their wings from any sharp bits sticking out. If a rodent makes an unwelcome visit, they sting it to death and then embalm the body with propolis and bees wax so it will not rot in the hive!

Amazing properties

The health benefits of propolis have been known to humans for thousands of years with the renowned Greek physician, Hippocrates, prescribing honey containing propolis for patients with ulcers way back in 400 B.C. In the first century AD the Roman scholar, Pliny, described its use in health, while Roman mythology tells the tale of Melissa who was turned into a bee by Jupiter so that she could make the substance for healing.

As life goes full circle more and more people are beginning to reap the benefits of propolis once again. Containing 55 per cent resin and balm, 30 per cent wax, 10 per cent essential oil, and 5 per cent pollen and a number of natural chemicals, many of its health-giving properties come from bioflavonoids.

Bioflavonoids block the formation of prostaglandins which cause pain and fever, and gum disease. They also stimulate white blood cells to produce interferon which is resistant to infection and has been recognised as a vital component in treating cancer.

Propolis is also a prime source of histamine and serotonin and the bioflavonoids act to prevent and cure allergies by blocking the acids which break into cells and cause allergic reactions.

How to take

There are several ways of taking propolis – as a tincture it can be gargled or ingested, while tablets, capsules, granules and powder can be taken internally. Propolis salve or cream can be rubbed on the skin and lozenges can be sucked for sore throats, mouth ulcers and gum disease, and it is also included in lipsalves to fight cold sores, shampoos, and toothpastes.

The proof of the pudding

Research has been carried out into the properties and effectiveness of propolis and clinical trials continue all the time. One study carried out at the Department of Biochemistry at Oxford University on the anti-inflammatory properties have shown that propolis inhibits the over-production of chemicals after injury.

Other trials were carried out in Yugoslavia on people suffering liver damage due to irradiation, others with heart disease and arteriosclerosis, and groups of people with shingles, and gastric and duodenal ulcers. Locally applied as a salve it has healed vaginal inflammation, cervical erosion, and painful menstruation.

Case study

Tom, 78, has prided himself on being active, playing bowls and going for lots of walks. When he was 72 he banged his knee on a chair and a few days later he could not put his foot down on the ground and was completely unable to walk. 'I could barely get out of bed to go to the bathroom, or get up in the morning and I had to walk with a stick.'

He and his wife went to see the doctor who suggested a knee replacement and prescribed Ibuprofen tablets for Tom, but his wife Mary was worried about the long-term side-effects of taking the drug because she knew they would irritate his gut.

After Tom had X-rays taken at hospital he was diagnosed with gout, but Mary, a retired nursing sister had read about propolis and decided to get some for him.

She insists, 'It is very slow acting and you have to take sufficient. People take a little for a short time and say it doesn't work. You have to keep at it and if possible catch the ailment early.'

Tom started out taking 3,000 mg a day and after two or three months he was back walking with his wife and doing the garden. The following summer he started bowling again and now he claims, 'I have two new knees.'

Gathering buds

Propolis is a greenish brown rubbery substance **is** gathered by bees from tree barks – particularly poplar and horse chestnut – and leaf buds. They use it to seal up the holes and cracks in their hives to stop rain and cold from pervading and to guard against contaminants. With the substance they create a labyrinth at the entrance to prevent intruders and so that the hive bees pass over it on entry preventing them from spreading infection to the other 45,000 to 50,000 inhabitants.

Xynergy comment

At Xynergy we are great believers in propolis and have been ever since we were introduced to Comvita Propolis more than a decade ago. Definitely worth a try and available in so many different formats – tincture, elixir, lozenges... even lollipops.

Frances Ive is a journalist and author specialising in natural health and nutrition. Visit her excellent website www.healthysoul.co.uk