



Honey of a Remedy

by Cheryl L. Detamore, DVM

It was a balmy Sunday night. I was a year or so out of school, with a spirit too high to be deterred by any emergency, when the call came in: “yearling with a pretty big cut on the front of her shoulder.” My enthusiasm quickly faded when I saw the filly with an open wound over her tiny chest bigger than my hand.

While cleaning the wound, I went about the hard business of explaining that conventional treatment was simply not an option. The skin and subcutaneous tissues were ripped away, revealing the underlying muscle. Then, as the reality of the situation finally set in, I had a revelation. So with as much confidence as I could muster, I explained that we would try an old remedy - honey.

Needless to say, I could see the skepticism on the owners’ faces as I told them to go shopping for raw honey, lots of it. Meanwhile, I gave the filly a tetanus shot and applied a half bottle of honey they had on hand - grocery store honey, but better than nothing - and left them with instructions to apply a generous amount of honey daily.

Each time I checked on the little gal, I was amazed at how well she was responding to the honey regimen. There were no signs of infection and the wound margins were rapidly shrinking. Within a few months, the only evidence of the trauma was a thin diagonal scar.

And so began my love affair with honey. Many years later I still marvel at the healing power of this amazing substance. But while it’s beginning to gain momentum in human practice, honey is not widely used in veterinary medicine.

A Natural Healer

Dating back thousands of years, the healing power of honey is well documented. Anthropologists have evidence that

Egyptians used it as a remedy as early as 5,000 years ago, while Roman soldiers carried it into battle. Ancient cave paintings, meanwhile, depict primitive people robbing bees of their honey.

Considering the healing properties of honey, its loyal following throughout history is no surprise. Honey rapidly clears existing infection, while preventing additional invasion. This is because most bacteria are not capable of existing in the presence of honey due to its low-water content. That’s in addition to a low acidity that inhibits the growth of bacteria.

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An antioxidant, honey also gains wound-fighting strength from another naturally occurring process: hydrogen peroxide is produced when honey is diluted by wound secretions, which aids in the natural debridement (removal of dead or damaged tissue) of wounds while preventing bandages from sticking. As a result, bandages can be left in place longer without being changed. This phenomenon is also responsible for reducing wound odors.

A natural anti-inflammatory, honey reduces swelling while stimulating epithelial tissue to expand - contributing to rapid healing with minimal scarring. Honey also appears to alleviate pain and helps boost the immune system. Consult your veterinarian before starting a honey regimen.

Raw Honey Is Best

While honey from your favorite grocery store may look pretty and impart a nice sweetness to your favorite tea, it’s a long way from raw honey. That’s because much of the therapeutic value is lost during processing. Pasteurized honey has been heated to reduce moisture, which helps prevent granulation and improves shelf life; however, this process also diminishes the healing constituents of honey.

As with anything else, organic is generally better. Organic honey is produced from hives untreated with antibiotics or pesticides - a real challenge in times with so much hive disease. In fact, organic bee colonies are maintained without using any chemicals and the hives are isolated in environmentally pure areas free from any potential contaminants. Organic honey can be certified by national or independent agencies. Don't assume that just because it's raw honey that it's organic as well.

Because raw honey isn't heated, it is prone to crystallization. This is a natural process and doesn't harm the honey. When stored in large containers and at room temperature, it is less likely to granulate, but placing honey in the refrigerator will hasten the process. However, honey can be successfully frozen and thawed at room temperature without detrimental effect. When honey does crystallize, applying low heat will dissolve the crystals. But once dissolved, it should be demoted to kitchen use, as any amount of heat will diminish its therapeutic value.

A visit to your local natural foods store will reveal a variety of raw honeys, all unique in color and clarity. Most raw honeys are sold in glass containers, but some producers offer the classic plastic honey-bear-bottle design. When shopping for raw honey, you'll also encounter different varieties, such as clover, wildflower and tupelo. The flowers from which bees collect nectar contribute to the flavor and aroma of honey, and also determine its variety. Don't be intimidated by the many different varieties; it's simply a matter of personal choice. I've used practically all of them.

Proper Application Is Key

I have to admit, I'm fond of the honey-bear bottle (with tip) because it provides me better precision over small or hard-to-reach areas, while a tongue depressor and a large jar works best for extensive conditions. Whatever your method, apply a generous coating of honey daily. More severe conditions may require attention several times a day. After the initial cleaning, avoid cleansing the area between applications - this will disrupt the healing process and introduce contamination. Just continue to add honey over top of the existing residue.

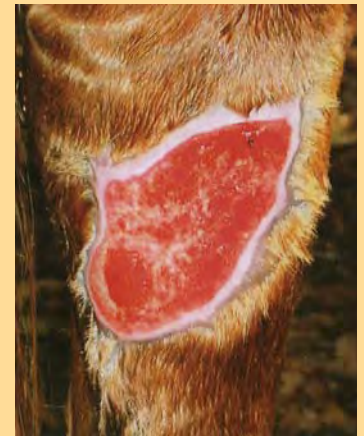
Since then, my use of honey has multiplied and evolved numerous times over. I discovered many other uses besides catastrophic wounds. And, at the same time, I began exploring other natural remedies to complement my use of honey.

I currently use a combination of honey, lanolin and essential oils in a salve I developed. Using the highest-quality, therapeutic-grade ingredients found in nature, it creates an optimal environment for healing. And by enhancing the honey with other natural ingredients, I've been able to expand my use of honey to a wide range of common equine ailments: thrush, rain rot, ringworm, frostbite, sunburn, dermatitis, allergic reactions and skin infections.

Honey in Action



Before



1 Week



2 Weeks



8 weeks

Dr. Detamore's patient Waylon had a massive wound that exposed the entire front of his hock joint.

The owner applied a honey-based salve daily, and within a few days, all signs of infection disappeared and new tissue began to grow over the joint.

The skin margins closed quickly and left only a tiny scar.

Waylon was back to his normal routine in about two months.

Did you know
the latest thing
in horse health
has actually
been around
thousands of
years?



(Hint: It's honey)

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As you can see, my career has taken many turns since I first experienced the curative properties of honey. You might even say that the filly I treated all those years ago and I have grown up together: she has thrived and so has my veterinary practice. To this day, I'm still a hero to her owners. Not because she overcame a potentially life-threatening injury but, I like to think, because of my courage to go out on a limb.

And it's all because of honey. ☺☺

About the author:

Cheryl L. Detamore, DVM, has practiced equine medicine for 12 years, including a stint specializing in Thoroughbred horses in the heart of Kentucky's horse country. A graduate of the Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Detamore now practices in Virginia and West Virginia, where she developed and produces her honey-based salve, MeliHeal.
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