

HOW RAW HONEY CAN IMPROVE GUT HEALTH



Chronic gut issues are on the rise. It was reported in the UK's Independent newspaper in 2016 that Irritable Bowel Syndrome affects an estimated 10 to 20 per cent of the UK population and there is an increase in inflammatory bowel diseases like Crohn's and Ulcerative Colitis. Back in 2012 a study published in the journal Gastroenterology

indicated that inflammatory bowel diseases (IBDs) are emerging as a global problem.

In an age of living fast and eating fast, with stress and environmental pollutants affecting the body, it is more important than ever to be aware of what we eat and how our bodies feel and function. A balanced gut improves digestion, and studies have shown that if we take care of our gut health we are looking after our mental health too.

To understand how raw honey can improve gut health, first let's look at what's happening inside our bodies.

How the gut works

We chew our food which starts the digestive process as the saliva breaks down the food and swallowing pushes the food down into the stomach. Peptic acid and enzymes dilute and continue to break up the food and stomach acid

and enzymes digest proteins and kill the majority of bacteria in the food. What's left is delivered to the small intestine where the major food groups, protein, fat and carbohydrate, are broken down into amino acids, sugars and fatty acids which are absorbed into the blood stream. The colon or large intestine takes the unabsorbed remnants. It extracts salt and water while the trillions of colonic bacteria ferment unabsorbed sugars, starches and proteins into short chain fatty acids, which can then be utilized as a source of energy. The pancreas secretes an alkaline juice with powerful enzymes that break down protein, fat and carbohydrates. It is also the source of the hormone insulin. The liver receives blood from the gut, filters it, removes toxins, metabolizes drugs, stores nutrients and synthesizes proteins. It also synthesizes bile. which the gall bladder stores and

concentrates; after a meal, this is squeezed it into the small intestine where it helps to digest fat.

4 Reasons why raw honey is good for the gut

1. Raw honey supports the digestive system because it does not ferment in the stomach like most refined sugars that aggravate the digestive tract.
2. Raw honey is alkaline-forming unlike processed honey which is acid-forming so helps combat inflammation.
3. Raw honey contains oligosaccharides (sugars) that can serve as a fuel source (prebiotic) for beneficial bacteria in the gut.
4. Raw honey contains small amounts of polyphenols that protect good bacteria and displace bad bacteria.

Raw honey, probiotics and prebiotics

Probiotics are live beneficial bacteria that are introduced into our guts through supplements and foods. Prebiotics provide the food that helps beneficial microbes in the stomach flourish.

Prebiotics were first identified and named by French professor of pharmaceutical sciences Marcel Roberfroid in 1995. Roberfroid's defines prebiotics as: *a selectively fermented ingredient that allows specific changes in the gastrointestinal microflora that confers benefits upon host well-being and health.* As prebiotics make their way through the stomach without being broken down by either gastric acids or digestive enzymes, they bring about positive changes in the digestive tract and organs. Raw honey has the prebiotic fibre components needed to feed the probiotics to provide healthy bacteria in the gut.

How raw honey can help indigestion

Because of the alkaline effect on the digestive tract, raw honey can help or prevent indigestion. A spoonful of raw honey before you eat can help. Alternatively, you can drink it in warm water or herbal tea straight after you have eaten or before going to bed to help with digestion. It is also believed that honey helps keep digestion moving smoothly because it contains certain enzymes that give the digestive system a boost.

Raw honey and acid reflux

Gastro-oesophageal reflux (GERD) is when the lower oesophageal sphincter (LES) is weak allowing the stomach's contents to flow up into the oesophagus. During normal digestion, the LES opens to allow food to pass into the stomach and closes to prevent food and acidic stomach juices from flowing back into the oesophagus. Raw honey can soothe this, along with heartburn. Research indicates that raw honey can help reduce

symptoms associated with acid reflux and it can aid in healing the oesophagus. What occurs when you consume honey is that it lines the oesophagus, which helps heal inflammation or damage; this will ultimately help reduce GERD symptoms along with avoiding alcohol and sugars that can cause inflammation and aggravate the sensitive lining of the oesophagus.

Inflammatory bowel syndrome (IBS), ulcerative colitis (UC)

IBS and UC are inflammatory bowel diseases. The treatments generally include diet adaption and in severe cases, anti-inflammatory drugs and antibiotics. These are often prescribed for long periods of time particularly when a sufferer has regular or severe relapses.

In the book, *Honey in Traditional and Modern Medicine*, edited by Laïd Boukraâe, it states the

Chandigarh Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research discovered eating regular doses of Manuka honey can help. They induced the digestive ailments in experimental rats, then fed the animals Manuka honey. At examination, the rats that received the honey showed greatly reduced levels of inflammation in the bowel, and improved values for cell changes and antioxidant levels.

Angela Ysseldyk, Nutritionist and Beekeeper's Daughter shares an important study in her blog, released in July 2016, which found that by treating Ulcerative Colitis with honey, both enteric cells and nerves could be regenerated in the colon. The ability of honey to apparently replenish healthy tissue and nerve function also corresponded with a lower level of cell death, and both oxidative and inflammatory markers.

Always seek medical advice if you are showing symptoms of an inflammatory bowel disease but a spoonful of raw honey on a regular basis along with other anti-inflammatory foods should help ease the symptoms.

Raw honey when taking antibiotics

It's important to protect your digestive system if you're taking antibiotics. You can do this by eating enough foods with "good bacteria," or probiotics. The body has to feed the good bacteria in our guts in order to have a balanced gut environment. Raw honey is a good source of prebiotic which helps feed good bacteria like bifidobacteria and lactobacilli. Raw honey is also a natural antibiotic.

Raw honey is a non-dairy probiotic

Raw honey is a non-dairy probiotic product which is beneficial in that it not only tastes great but it works for people who are lactose intolerant or

allergic to dairy products. Dairy products like natural yoghurt are typically used for their probiotic/prebiotic properties, raw honey is an excellent alternative source for prebiotics.

To summarize, raw honey is a natural, active ingredient. It is alive with healing and highly nutritional compounds to compliment the body and aid gut function. Add a tablespoon of raw honey to your daily routine either with natural yoghurt, a smoothie, herbal tea or eat it straight from the spoon and you will be giving your body a natural prebiotic/probiotic boost.

Sources include: Handbook of Prebiotics by Glenn Gibson and Marcel Roberfroid, [Probiotics Center](#), [Oxford Academic Journals](#), [WebMD](#), [NHS UK](#) Balqees