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Fresh Evidence... Could 1 Teaspoon per Day Tame Your Allergy Problems?

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Many allergy sufferers believe that locally produced honey can alleviate symptoms. The idea is that bees become covered in pollen spores when they fly from one flower to the next -- spores which are then transferred to their honey.

It is thought that eating that honey, even just a spoonful a day, can build immunity through gradual exposure.

For some reason the New York Times recently chose to report on this topic citing the negative results of a nearly *decade-old study*, stating:

"In the study ... the scientists followed dozens of allergy sufferers through the springtime allergy season. The subjects were randomly split into three. One consumed a tablespoonful daily of locally collected, unpasteurized and unfiltered honey; another ate commercial honey; and a third was given a corn syrup placebo with synthetic honey flavoring.

After tracking the subjects' symptoms for months, the scientists found that neither of the honey groups saw improvements over the placebo group."

Interestingly enough, a study published earlier **this year** came to a completely different conclusion!

This brand new study assessed the effects of the pre-seasonal use of birch pollen honey or regular honey on symptoms and medication during birch pollen season.



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A total of 44 patients with diagnosed birch pollen allergy consumed either the birch pollen honey or regular honey daily from November to March. The control group consisted of 17 patients who were just using their usual allergy medication to control symptoms.

The study found that, during birch pollen season, compared to the control group, the patients using birch pollen honey experienced:

- 60 percent reduction in symptoms
- Twice as many asymptomatic days
- 70 percent fewer days with severe symptoms
- 50 percent decrease in usage of antihistamines

The New York Times article linked below may require a subscription to view. It may, however, be possible to view it in its entirety by using a [web search](#).

Sources:

- » [New York Times May 9, 2011](#)
- » [Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology February 2002;88\(2\):198-203](#)
- » [International Archives of Allergy and Immunology 2011; 155\(2\): 160-166](#)



Dr. Mercola's Comments:

Asthma is a growing problem, both for children and adults. In the last two decades, the incidence of asthma has increased by more than 300 percent, and it now affects [about 20 million Americans](#).

Locally produced honey is believed by many to be a viable alternative treatment, despite the lack of scientific evidence of its effectiveness. However, before throwing the idea out as being bogus due to this lack, it's worth noting that precious few studies have ever been done on local honey as an asthma remedy. And lack of evidence is not to be equated with evidence of lack of efficacy.

I had to conduct extensive searches just to find the references I will provide later in this article. There is however, a rather large body of anecdotal evidence—people who have tried it with great success. And anecdotal evidence can be just as important when considering a treatment. For example, many drugs are prescribed off label, not because there have been extensive studies done showing beneficial results, but because "word spreads" that a certain drug "appears to provide benefit" for health problems unrelated to its approved use.

The Theory of Local Honey as an Asthma Treatment

The theory itself actually appears quite sound.

The idea is that locally produced honey, which will contain pollen spores picked up by the bees from local plants, can act much in the same way as a natural type of vaccine. By introducing a small amount of allergen into your system, your immune system is activated and over time can build up your natural immunity against it.

Why should the honey be locally produced?

Because your allergies are activated through exposure to pollens present in your local area. Different states, for example, can have wildly varying types of plants, grasses and other foliage, each of which can cause allergic reactions in different people.

The typical recommendation is to take about a teaspoon-full of locally produced honey per day, starting a few months PRIOR to the pollen season, to allow your system to build up immunity.

What Does the Science Say?

The [study featured by the New York Times](#), published all the way back in 2002, found that local honey offered no benefit over a placebo.

However, a far more [recent study, published this year](#), in fact, differs in its conclusion.

This study "assessed the effects of the pre-seasonal use of birch pollen honey (birch pollen added to honey) or regular honey on symptoms and medication during birch pollen season." One of the primary differences between these two studies is that the latter narrows it down to one specific allergen (birch).

A total of 44 patients with diagnosed birch pollen allergy consumed either the birch pollen honey or regular honey daily from November to March. The control group consisted of 17 patients who were just using their usual allergy medication to control symptoms. From April through May, the patients recorded their symptoms and use of medication daily.

The study found that, during birch pollen season, compared to the control group, the patients using birch pollen honey experienced:

- 60 percent reduction in symptoms
- Twice as many asymptomatic days
- 70 percent fewer days with severe symptoms



- 50 percent decrease in usage of antihistamines

Interestingly enough, there were few differences between the two honey groups (those who took regular honey, versus those who took honey that contained birch pollen.) However, the birch pollen honey group used less histamines than those who used regular honey.

The authors concluded that:

"Patients who pre-seasonally used birch pollen honey had significantly better control of their symptoms than did those on conventional medication only, and they had marginally better control compared to those on regular honey.

*The results should be regarded as preliminary, but they indicate that **birch pollen honey could serve as a complementary therapy for birch pollen allergy.**"*

Honey for Hay Fever

Another source of information comes from a short book, published in 1990, called [Honey and Hay Fever: A Report on the Treatment of Hay Fever with Honey](#). The abstract states:

"[A]n account of a small clinical trial involving 21 patients known to suffer from hay fever is given. The patients were advised to eat 10-20 grams of honey each day for a period lasting from autumn 1987 up to and through the following hay fever season. In some instances honey comb cappings were also eaten. The patients filled in detailed reports on any symptoms experienced during the trial and these are summarized in a table.

*The mean age of the **16 patients who reported beneficial effects** was 42.6 years, compared with 33.2 years for those who reported no benefit. The patients who reported benefit had suffered from hay fever for longer (average 24.8 years) than the other 5 patients (17 years)."*

Although I do not own this book, so I can't specify the benefits or how substantial these benefits were, it appears that a significant majority, 16 out of 21, did report *some form* of beneficial effects from honey. In this case, it appears as though regular honey, as opposed to locally produced honey, was used. But as the results from the study above indicate, regular honey may impart some benefits in and of itself, regardless of whether it's local honey or not...

Two Important Warnings

While I believe there's truth to the anecdotal claims that local honey can help reduce symptoms of asthma, it's important to be aware that honey itself can also trigger in some



cases **severe allergic reactions**, including anaphylactic shock. So clearly you should not attempt to use honey if you've ever experienced an adverse reaction to honey in the past. Also be careful and use it very sparingly in the beginning until you've confirmed that you can tolerate it.

Another important point to remember is that honey is high in [fructose, which, in excessive amounts](#), typically about 70-80% of honey is fructose and it can exacerbate pre-existing insulin resistance and wreak havoc on your body.

Each teaspoon of honey has nearly four grams of fructose so carefully add the total grams of fructose (including fruits) that you consume each day, and stay below **25 grams of total fructose per day**. This is particularly important if you suffer from signs of elevated insulin, such as:

- Overweight
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Diabetes

But as long as it's used in moderation, eating raw honey is likely to promote health, and may indeed help alleviate asthma symptoms.



The MOST Important Allergy "Treatment" You Need to Pay Attention to

While I believe you certainly could try using local honey to reduce your asthma symptoms, there's another dietary/lifestyle factor that plays an absolutely CRUCIAL role in asthma, namely *vitamin D*. In fact, recent research suggests that [vitamin D deficiency may be a primary underlying cause of asthma](#). This means that many are needlessly suffering with a potentially life threatening ailment, since vitamin D deficiency is easily remedied.

It's important to remember that [you will likely need far more than the recommended daily allowance](#), which is a mere 200 to 600 units a day, depending on your age. You really need to make sure you're getting [therapeutic levels](#), which is between 50-70 ng/ml.

Ideally, you'll want to get your vitamin D from safe sun exposure.

Beware that using sunscreen when outdoors effectively shields your skin from making any vitamin D. Another alternative is using [a safe tanning bed](#), or if neither of those options are available, [an oral vitamin D3 supplement](#).

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If you get your levels to about 60 ng/ml there's a strong likelihood -- especially if you combine it with exercise and balancing out your omega 3 and omega 6 fats as described below -- that you will not experience asthma anymore.

Additional Safe and Effective Strategies to Treat Asthma

Although asthma is a serious disease, safely treating your asthma is not a complicated affair. Optimizing your vitamin D levels is the first step, but there are other basic strategies that can help treat the root of the problem as well.

In my experience, the following strategies are highly effective when treating asthma:

- **Increase your intake of animal-based omega 3 fats** – I can't emphasize enough the importance of getting sufficient amounts of high quality *animal*-based omega 3 fats in your diet.

Although I strongly believe we all need plant-based omega 3 fats, the difference is that most people do not possess the metabolic machinery to rapidly convert the ALA in these plants to the higher order fats DHA and EPA, which are potent anti-inflammatories. Make sure to ask your WellnessOne practitioner which Omega 3's he recommends.



- **Reduce your intake of omega 6 fats** – In addition to adding omega 3 fats to your diet, you also want to [reduce the amount of omega 6 fats](#) you consume because the ratio between these two fats is very important.

Many don't realize that about a century ago, people only consumed 1-2 pounds of plant-based omega 6 fats per year. Today, the average American is consuming about 75-80 pounds a year of these vegetable oils, such as corn oil, soy and safflower oil. When you eat processed foods daily, the balance between omega 3 and omega 6 fats will become distorted, which can cause the type of inflammation that leads to asthma.

- **Consider the hygiene hypothesis** – There's a tendency in our modern culture to be obsessive about cleanliness, especially in children. However, this may not be as healthy as initially thought. It appears that being exposed to common bacterial and viral infections as a child can be instrumental in providing the [stimulus to your immune system to prevent asthma naturally](#).
- **Get regular exercise** – [Exercise \(especially out in fresh air if you're an asthmatic\)](#) is actually crucial, as it helps to moderate insulin levels. It increases your insulin receptor sensitivity, and as a result your body produces less insulin, which tends to optimize it. You can also use allergy testing to build up your immune system. However, my experience is that conventional testing does not work very effectively and there is a fair

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amount of risk. A far better test would be [provocation neutralization testing](#), which is an intradermal skin test.

The [American Academy of Environmental Medicine](#) (AAEM) has a list of physicians who are trained in this highly effective technique.

As for natural remedies, you can try some Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*). This perennial shrub has been used since ancient times to treat a variety of conditions. As far back as the 17th century, butterbur was used to treat coughs, asthma, and skin wounds. Researchers have since identified the [compounds in butterbur that help reduce symptoms in asthma by inhibiting leukotrienes and histamines](#), which are responsible for symptom aggravation in asthma.

Also remember that pasteurized milk products are notorious for making asthma worse.



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