

Propolis

When looking at the products from the beehive it's hard to ignore the power of propolis. This substance may provide us with a range of benefits both when ingested and used topically, but where does this "bee glue" come from, just what exactly is Propolis?

Bees collect resins from tree bark, leaves and plant life including tree buds, sap flows, and various other botanical sources, and combine them with their own secretions to create propolis. The biological role of resin in trees is to defend against bacteria and fungi and also insects and other living organisms. So the bees, in collecting these resins, inherit their medicinal properties for use around their own hive.

Its primary function around the hive includes improving the structure of the actual beehive and closing certain gaps and openings. Beeswax is also used to seal larger cracks in the hive wall but propolis benefits the environment in important ways that beeswax cannot. The most important use of this substance in the beehive is as an anti-viral anti-biotic agent. It is used to create a sterile environment and stop the spread of disease in the bee colony. Various small animals and insects find their way into the hive during the course of its life cycle, and invariably cannot find their way out – they die within the confines of the hive walls. In the case of smaller insects, the bees can actually remove their carcasses from the hive, but with larger animals and rodents, a field mouse for example, the bees use propolis to coat the carcass and and basically seal it, preventing the growth and spread of viruses and fungi.

Obviously it becomes easy to see why bee propolis may have benefits to man. Its potent anti viral and antibiotic properties are of great interest in the medical community, where it is being examined as a possible alternative to chemical antibiotics or in some cases a partner to make them more effective.

The substance appears most commonly as a dark brown color but it is also found in other colors such as red and green. As with other substances extracted from the hive, propolis exhibits regional and seasonal variations, making it difficult to provide a specific list of nutritional elements.

Since we've discussed its topical benefits - relief of various conditions, including inflammations, viral diseases, ulcers, burns etc - it should also be noted that the core constituent of propolis, mainly resin, is an abundant source of flavonoids. As such it is taken as a dietary supplement and associated with treating a range of conditions and promoting specific types of health. Propolis is believed to promote heart health, strengthen the immune system and reduce the chances of cataracts, as examples of the benefits of propolis.

propolis benefits These claims have various levels of support, not all of which are of the highest integrity. But some of the health benefit claims are being or have been clinically investigated, with studies published in biomedical literature. One area where there seems to be little contention into the possibility of real tangible benefits is in the area of dental hygiene and the treatment of mouth sores, ulcers and cankers. Various companies offer propolis toothpaste and others offer various forms of canker sore treatments, usually a liquid propolis blend in some form of spray.

In a reference article found here the following information was published -

"Propolis is bee-produced substance with pronounced anti-inflammatory effect. It is an ingredient of many drugs; it is added to toothpastes as a prophylactic component for periodontal diseases. The plaque-cleaning, plaque-inhibiting and anti-inflammatory actions of the silicate paste were studied. The study included 42 individuals in good clinical health and a minimum of 20 intact teeth. Control exams were performed on days 1, 7, 14, 21 and 28. The baseline values gradually decreased after each control tooth brushing with a statistically significant difference between them. The toothpaste shows very good plaque-cleaning, plaque-inhibiting and anti-inflammatory effect".

So clearly, there are some health benefits to using bee propolis, at least insofar as its use in dental hygiene. But it is not difficult to find other forms of clinical research into using the substance to benefit health in other ways too, so it seems that these benefits, though not fully explored, not fully corroborated, do have some basis in medical fact.