

# A Decisive Review Contemplating the Nutritional, Prophylactic and Therapeutic Efficacy of Asl (Honey) in the Context of Tib-E-Nabwi (Traditional Prophetic Medicine)

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## ABSTRACT

Asl (Honey) is a remarkable viscous liquid, prepared by bees from nectars of various plants. It has occupied a prominent place in traditional medicines throughout history. The ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Chinese, Greeks and Romans employed honey for various diseases. The Noble Qur'an and many Prophetic narrations refer to honey as a great healer of the diseases. Allah, Almighty, says (what means): "And your Lord inspired the bee, saying: 'Take your habitations within the mountains and within the trees and in what they erect. Then, eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord made easy (for you).' There comes forth from their bellies, a drink of varying colour wherein is healing for men. Verily, during this is indeed a symbol for people that think." [Al-Qur'an 16:68-69]

**Objective:** To explore the various narrations of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) in authentic scriptures about honey and to find out its efficacy on the basis of various scientific studies.

**Methods:** Thorough literature review including Ahadith and various scientific studies and several online databases including Web of Science, Science Direct, and PubMed were explored to suffice the objective.

**Keywords:** Honey; anti-inflammatory; anti-oxidant; nutritional value; Prophetic narrations; traditional medicines

## INTRODUCTION

The use of traditional medicine to treat infection has been practiced since the origin of mankind, and honey produced by honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) is one of the oldest traditional medicines considered to be important for the treatment of several human ailments. For an extended time in human history, honey was a crucial source of carbohydrates and therefore the only widely available sweetener. The first written regard to honey, a Sumerian tablet writing, dating back to 2100-2000 BC, mentions honey's use as a drug and an ointment. Ancient Egyptian civilization (The Edwin Smith Papyrus, 2600-2200 BC) gives the recipe for a honey ointment and instructions how to use it. Yet the traditional physicians were conscious of differences within the therapeutic value of the honeys available to them; Aristotle (384-322 BC), discussing differences in honeys, mentioned pale honey being "good as a salve for sore eyes and wounds"; and Dioscorides (c.50 AD) stated that a straw honey from Attica was the only, being "good for all rotten and hollow

ulcers". Ibn-e-Sina (known as Avicenna in the West) recommended honey mixed with onion juice, clover, or wheat grass for the eyes. Being anti-oxidant it also helps to stop process of aging. Zakaria Razi (known as Rhazes in the West) in *Al-Hawi Fit- Tibb* (10th Volume) described various prophylactic and therapeutic properties of honey [1].

Honey has had an extensive history in human consumption, and is employed in various foods and beverages as a sweetener and flavouring. It also features a role in religion and symbolism. Medicinal importance of honey has been documented in the world's oldest medical literatures, and since the traditional times, it's been known to possess antimicrobial property also as wound-healing activity. In most ancient cultures honey has been used for both nutritional and medical purposes. The assumption that honey may be a nutrient, a drug and an ointment has been carried into our days, and thus, an alternate medicine branch, called apitherapy, has been developed in recent years [2].

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## Asl (honey) as prophetic medicine

The Noble Quran is full of scientific statements and notions. What's most amazing is that everyone among those scientific statements and notions had been proven to be in perfect agreement with science and our modern-day scientific discoveries. Honey has also been mentioned in Holy Quran, wherein it's stated, "There comes from their (honeybees) bellies a drink of the various colours during which there's healing for mankind" (The glorious Qur'an; Surah Nahl-The Bee, verse 69). Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, (May Allah be pleased with him), related: a person came to the Prophet, (peace be upon him), and said: "My brother has some abdominal trouble." The Prophet, (peace be upon him), said to him, "Let him drink honey." the person returned to the Prophet, (peace be upon him), and said: "O Messenger of Allah! I let him drink honey, but it caused him more pain." The Prophet, (peace be upon him), said to him: "Go and let him drink honey!" the person went and let his brother drink honey then returned back and said: "O Messenger of Allah, it didn't cause him except more pains." The Prophet, (peace be upon him), then said: "Allah has said the reality, but your brother's abdomen has told a lie. Let him drink honey." So he made him drink honey and he was cured. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] This was confirmed by scientists who assembled during the International Apiculture Conference held from 20-26 September 1993 in China. During the conference, treatments with honey derivatives were discussed. American scientists especially said that honey secretion, pollen and propolis (bee resin) cure many diseases. [3]

A Romanian doctor stated that he tried honey on cataract patients, and 2002 out of his 2094 patients recovered completely. Polish doctors also informed the conference that bee resin helps to cure many diseases like haemorrhoids, skin problems, gynaecological diseases and much of other disorders [4].

## Other prophetic narrations about asl

So he (Prophet) gave him honey to eat again then he was cured (when a specific man complained his brother's indigestion . (Narrated Abu Sa'id Khudri; Bukhari, Muslim)

The Prophet did indeed wish to eat sweetmeats and honey. (Narrated Ayesha; Bukhari, Muslim) Sahih al-Bukhari 5682 Book 76, Hadith 5 (English) reference : Vol. 7, Book71, Hadith 586

The Prophet said, "You have the only remedy in scarification and eating honey." (Narrated Jabir bin'Abdullah; Bukhari, Muslim)

The Prophet said, "There are three remedies- use of honey, scarification and cauterization. I counsel my followers against cautery." (Narrated Ibn'Abbas; Bukhari, Muslim) Sahih al-Bukhari ; Book 76, Hadith 3 (English) reference Vol. 7, Book 71, Hadith 584

I offered (to Prophet) the drink made up of honey extract of currants and milk. (Narrated Anas bin Malik; Muslim, Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book : 23 Kitab Al-Ashriba ,The Book Of Drinks Chapter 8 Book 23, Number 4982)

The Prophet want to drink honey with water daily in the morning. (Dhabi)

## Nutritional benefits of asl (honey)

For an extended time in human history, honey was a crucial source of carbohydrates and therefore the only widely available sweetener. One of the foremost encouraging honey nutrition facts - this natural sweetener is rich in phenolic acids and flavonoids, which are a source of natural antioxidants and is freed from fat and cholesterol. Honey contains natural minerals and vitamins which help metabolizing undesirable cholesterol and carboxylic acid on the organs and tissues into the system, hence preventing obesity and promoting better health for us. Honey contains about 0.1 to 0.6% proteins, mainly enzymes and amino acids. Honey contains variety of other trace elements. It also contains trace amounts of several minerals and vitamins. Niacin, calcium, copper, riboflavin, iron, magnesium, potassium and zinc in honey. From the nutritional point of view the minerals chrome, manganese and selenium are of nutritional importance. Honey contains choline and acetylcholine. Choline is an important for cardiovascular and brain function, and for cellular membrane composition and repair, while acetylcholine acts as a neurotransmitter. It contains vitamins B1, B2, C, B3, B5 and B6 all of which change consistent with the qualities of the nectar and pollen [5].

## Asl (honey) as energy source

Honey may be a natural source of readily available carbohydrates providing 64 calories per tablespoon. Main sugars of honey are the monosaccharides, fructose and glucose. During digestion the principal carbohydrates fructose and glucose are quickly transported into the blood and may be utilized for energy requirements of the physical body. Honey may be as effective as glucose for carbohydrate replacement during endurance exercise. Honey is the best source of carbohydrate i.e. a mixture of glucose and fructose, which give great energy to the physical body. It's a perfect energy food for endurance because it is stored within the liver. It's laxative effect on the gastrointestinal system. It's even been shown to be low in calories and useful as a, people with heart condition or those overweight. Honey has been rightly termed by modern dieticians because the elixir of life. Some years back a jar of honey was found during a Tomb, built BC. Scientists were surprised to seek out that the honey was in perfect condition and will be utilized in diet. Honey provides quick energy and, therefore, in international athletic meets like Olympics, athletes are advised to require it regularly. Honey is definitely digestible and contains both vitamins and minerals for energy [6].

## Prophylactic and therapeutic benefits of asl

In recent days, honey is becoming acceptable as a reputable and effective therapeutic agent. Its beneficial role has been endorsed to its antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant activities also as boosting of the system [7].

### For gastro-intestinal system

Honey is reported to possess effects of preventing and treating gastrointestinal disorders like peptic ulcers, gastritis, and gastroenteritis. Honey could also be a potent inhibitor of the causing agent of peptic ulcers and gastritis, *Helicobacter pylori*. Honey has prebiotic effects: increasing the population of bacterial microflora important for the health of alimentary tract. Clinical trials are reported during which honey was found to be effective for the treatment of peptic ulcers and diarrhoea.

### For cardiovascular system

Honey provides an important part of the energy needed by the body for blood formation. Additionally, it helps in cleansing the blood. It's some positive effects in regulating and facilitating blood circulation. It also functions as a protection against capillary problems and arteriosclerosis. It is believed that a moderate quantity of honey and pomegranate (anar) is favourable for people with heart trouble or heart weaknesses.

### For wound healing

Honey facilitates healing process and prevents scarring. Honey has an anti-inflammatory action, which reduces the swelling around a wound. This improves circulation and thus hastens the healing process. It also reduces pain. Honey doesn't persist with the underlying wound tissues, so there is no tearing away of newly formed tissue, and no pain, when dressings are changed. Honey can also be used externally to plug healing when applied to wounds, even postoperative wounds. Honey has also been effective in its use to treat burns.

For Joint Pain Studies conducted at some western universities have reinforced the centuries old knowledge that honey is effective against arthritis. Taking a tablespoon honey and half teaspoon cinnamon powder has helped arthritic patients walk without pain. Honey with lukewarm water and slightly of cinnamon powder made into a paste and applied to the joints also helped in quick recovery (within minutes) from pain.

### Against chronic illnesses

Researchers believe, food products rich in antioxidants may prevent heart problems and cancer. Strong antioxidants are present in honey which inhibits destructive chemical reactions that cause many chronic illnesses. It has been claimed that honey taken in regulated doses for the aim of energy, doesn't raise blood sugar level. Some dieticians even recommend honey to patients of diabetes. Honey is extremely useful for the skin when used as a facial pack. In cases of persistent cough and pharyngitis, use of honey is extremely beneficial. Honey is diuretic, a laxative, and an honest cure for phlegm caused distempers. When given during labour, honey helps in reducing birth contractions. Recent researches have shown that honey is extremely efficacious in tuberculosis, appetite loss and nervous disorder including insomnia. Honey strengthens the body during convalescence. The use of honey has been recommended in various eye ointments, meant for sore eyes, trachoma and cataracts.

### For enhancing immunity

Flavonoids and polyphenols present in honey act as antioxidants that protect the structural integrity of cells and tissues and have the facility to neutralise free radicals, preventing damage to immune cells. Antioxidants help in neutralising the free radicals within the body. Research by the Michigan State University says that honey "is a system builder [with] antioxidant, anti-bacterial and anti-tumour properties." Honey is additionally known to complement T and B lymphocytes, antibodies, eosinophils, neutrophils, monocytes, and natural killer cells generation during primary and secondary immune responses in tissue culture. according to research by Department of Immunogenetics, BuAli Research Institute, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, in Iran, "A sugar, nigeroligosaccharides, present in honey has been observed to possess immunopotentiating effects. Non-sugar ingredients of honey are also responsible for immunomodulation."

### Maa-ui-asl or hydromel or honey water

Maa-ul-Asl is defined as honey mixed in water in the ratio of 1:4. Honey is boiled with water or sometimes with herbal decoction. It's useful in fever, irritation, thirst, and dry cough.

Oral administration of honey water (maa ul asl) is usually recommended in zaatul janb (pleurisy). Dietary recommendation in warm e kapid safravi (bilious hepatitis) and Phlegmatic hepatitis (Waram-e kapid Balghami). Use of cold water and other drinks (mashroob) reduces body temperature, while use of easily digestible and jayyadul kaimoos diet like maul asl, ma'ul shaer, kashak-us-shaer, aash-e-jau etc. are given in small amounts, just to provide strength to tabiat (physis/body's internal resistance) and to avoid further increase in morbid matter. Almost every classicist from Hippocrates to later, also as contemporary scholars of Unani medicine advocated the use of Hydromel [honey water / mentioned as Maa'ul Asl in Unani] for the initial rehabilitative phase of stroke. There must be some great therapeutic potential in hydromel because it's suggested extensively and exclusively during a malady as challenging as stroke. Hydromel when evaluated with contemporary therapeutic markers and modern scientific parameters, was found to boost immunity in conjunction with sort of other actions which can be helpful in achieving sensory also as motor functional enhancement and thereby alleviating acute attacks of stroke. Honey (*Apis indica*) is one of the sole drugs which performs nephroprotective activity are claimed to possess actions of Mudir-e-Baul (Diuretic), Mufattit-e-Hasat (Lithotriptic), Kasir-e-Riyah (Carminative); Taqwiyat-e-Gurda (Renal tonic) are described by Zakaria Razi in *Al-Hawi Fit-Tibb* 10th Volume.

### Pharmacological actions of asl (honey)

Muhallil-e-Waram (Anti-inflammatory)

Muqawwi e Meda (Tonic for stomach)

Mundamil-e-Qurooh (Wounds Healer)

Munaffith e Balgham (Expectorant)

Mushtahi (Appetizer)

Mufattit e Hisa't (Lithotryptic)  
 Hazim (Digestive)  
 Musakkin-e-Auja'a (Pain killer)  
 Jali (Detergent)  
 Musaffi e Dam (Blood purifier)  
 Mughazzi (Nutrient)  
 Mufatteh Sudad (Deobstruent)

### Therapeutic uses of asl (honey)

Sual e Balghami (Productive cough)  
 Waja al Uzn (Earache), Otitis media  
 Cataract, Epiphora  
 Azm e Tihal (Enlargement of spleen)  
 Laqwa (Bell's palsy)  
 Khushunat e Halaq (Sore throat)  
 Amraz e Ria (Chest diseases)  
 Falij (Paraplegia)  
 Hisat e Kuliya(Renal calculi) , Oliguria  
 Istisqa (Ascites)  
 Deedan e Ama (Intestinal worms), Insect bite  
 Amraz e Qalb (Heart diseases)  
 Waram e Lauzatain (Tonsillitis)  
 Qurooh (Wounds), Chloasma, Ring worm  
 Yaraqan (Jaundice)  
 Juzam (Leprosy)

### CONCLUSION

Uncontaminated honey may be a healthy, readily digestible, natural and energy rich food. It contains carbohydrates,

proteins, lipids, enzymes and vitamins. One tablespoon of honey provides around 60 calories and contains 11g of carbohydrates. 1mg of calcium, 0.2mg of iron, 0.1mg of B-complex vitamin and 1mg of vitamin C . Along with its nutritional value, honey exhibits antibacterial and anti-fungal properties, anti-diarrhoea, wound-healing and anti-inflammatory properties and anti-tussive and expectorant properties. Currently, many researchers have reported the antibacterial activity of honey and located that natural unheated honey has some broad-spectrum antibacterial activity when tested against pathogenic bacteria, oral bacteria also as food spoilage bacteria. It improves digestion if taken with apple cider vinegar. It is also reported to be wonderful for the joints. It is an efficient remedy for several eye diseases. If used as cosmetic, honey is a superb aid to take care of complexion and glow of skin and hair. Nowadays, apiculture and bee products have opened a replacement branch for research in countries advanced in science.

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