

Dip Into Honey Pot for Good Health

By Merritt McKinney

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Adding a little honey to your diet may do more than satisfy your sweet tooth. Honey may also boost levels of healthy antioxidants, new research suggests.

For centuries, honey has been known to have some beneficial effects, according to University of California-Davis researcher Dr. Heidrun B. Gross. In an interview with Reuters Health, Gross recalled her grandmother's advice to eat honey when she felt under the weather.

Now, Gross and her colleagues have provided scientific evidence to support what her grandmother knew all along.

"Honey is not just a sweetener," Gross said. It also has compounds called phenolics that have antioxidant properties, she explained. These substances quench free radicals, which are unstable byproducts of normal metabolism that cause damage to arteries, and to DNA that can lead to cancer and other diseases.

It is easy enough to take vitamin supplements that contain antioxidants, but Gross said she prefers "to look for foods, rather than compounds, that are already part of our diet."

In a study of 25 healthy adults, Gross and her colleagues showed that honey can boost antioxidant levels. For 29 days, participants added 4 tablespoons of buckwheat honey to their daily diet. The researchers tested two types of buckwheat honey with different amounts of antioxidants.

Blood samples taken at the beginning and end of the study showed that the total level of phenolics increased in both groups of volunteers.

Gross presented the results Sunday at a meeting of the American Chemical Society in Anaheim, California.

Previous research had shown that a single dose of honey can boost antioxidants, but Gross said that the current study is thought to be the first study of daily honey consumption.

"You can definitely increase the amount of antioxidants" by adding a little honey to your diet, Gross said. She noted that the study included only healthy people, so the jury is still out on the long-term health benefits of honey.

But for people interested in boosting antioxidant levels, the California researcher recommended adding 2 to 4 tablespoons a day to their diet. This amount of honey "definitely provides some antioxidants," she said, which may boost the body's defense system.

Gross advised people to consider substituting honey for other sweeteners that do not provide the same burst of antioxidants.

But not all honey is created equal in terms of antioxidants, Gross said. For the most part, the darker the honey, the more antioxidants it contains, she said.