Honey can bee the answer in NHS bug battle, says new research

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* **BY** RECORD REPORTER

THE healing properties of manuka honey could save the NHS money and help keep devices clean.

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MANUKA honey could be used to help keep internal medical devices such as urinary catheters free of infection, according to new research.

Scientists at the University of Southampton have found that even low dilutions of Manuka honey can curb the activity and growth of bacterial biofilms - a thin layer of microbes that build up on, and stick to, any surface including plastic.

The findings, published online in the Journal Of Clinical Pathology, could lead to the honey being used in patients fitted with medical devices, such as urinary catheters, which carry a high infection risk.

Around 100 million urinary catheters, used to drain the bladder of urine, are sold worldwide every year.

Up to one in four hospital inpatients may have to use a catheter. However, long-term use is associated with frequent complications, such as inflammation and infection.

Associate Professor Bashir Lwaleed said: "We have been able to demonstrate that diluted honey is potentially a useful agent for reducing biofilm formation on indwelling plastic devices such as urinary catheters.

"Catheter infection rates can account for a large proportion of hospital acquired infections - it is an area of clinical practice that needs addressing.

"We hope that these results may offer an alternative way of preventing such infections. We believe that patients might also benefit from honey's anti-inflammatory properties, which are generally stronger in dark honeys, such as Manuka and that antibacterial resistance is unlikely to be a factor when honey is used."

Honey has been used as a health remedy for centuries and recent research has also suggested that it may have antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.

Manuka honey is a monofloral honey produced in Australia and New Zealand from the nectar of the manuka tree.

The researchers said that further studies in which clinical conditions more closely resembled the flow of liquid in the bladder would be needed before any firm conclusions could be drawn.

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