

# bee products

Although many intriguing claims are made for the healing powers of bee products, there is little evidence to support most of them. Yet bee pollen, royal jelly, and propolis are popular nutritional supplements and continue to be the subject of scientific studies.

## COMMON USES

- May help hay fever symptoms.
- Aids in healing skin abrasions.

## FORMS

- Tablet
- Capsule
- Softgel
- Liquid
- Powder
- Cream
- Lozenge
- Dried and fresh pollen

## CAUTION!

- People with asthma or allergies to bee stings should be very careful when using bee products; they should avoid royal jelly entirely.
- Reminder: If you have a medical condition, talk to your doctor before taking supplements.

## What it is

There are three types of bee products available in health-food stores: bee pollen, propolis, and royal jelly. The most familiar of these is bee pollen. After the bees gather pollen from plants, they compress it into pellets, which beekeepers then collect from the hives. (A second type of pollen, also sold as bee pollen, is collected directly from plants, not from bees at all.) Bee pollen contains protein, B vitamins, carbohydrates, and various enzymes. Propolis (also called bee glue) is a sticky resin that bees collect from the buds of pine trees and use to repair cracks in their hives. Then there's royal jelly, a milky-white substance produced by the salivary glands of worker bees as a food source for the queen bee. (The specialized nutritional content of royal jelly may account for the fertility, large size, and increased longevity of the queen.)

## What it does

Bee products, especially bee pollen, have been touted as virtual cure-alls. Proponents assert that, among other things, these products slow aging, improve athletic performance, boost immunity, contribute to weight loss, fight bacteria, and alleviate the symptoms of allergies and hay fever. Although bee pollen shows some promise in treating allergies, and propolis may be effective as a salve for cuts and bruises, the scant research that has been conducted does not support the extravagant claims generally made for bee products.

✦ **MAJOR BENEFITS:** Bee pollen seems to help prevent the sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes, and other symptoms of seasonal pollen allergies. Some scientists believe that ingesting small amounts of pollen can desensitize an individual to its allergenic compounds, much as allergy shots do. Because your body produces antibodies when exposed to even



*Bee pollen (fresh or dried) is often sold in tablets or capsules.*

a tiny amount of pollen, your immune system then “remembers” it, preventing an extreme reaction that causes classic allergy symptoms. Testing of this theory is under way and until results are available, there appears to be no harm for most people in trying bee pollen. Various advocates maintain that to get the full anti-allergy benefit, you need to use bee pollen that comes from a local source, which will desensitize you to the specific pollens in your own environment.

**ADDITIONAL BENEFITS:** Bee propolis may play some role as a skin softener or wound healer. Research has shown that though propolis contains antibacterial compounds, these are not as effective as standard antibiotics or over-the-counter antibiotic ointments in fighting infection.

Because royal jelly enhances the growth, fertility, and longevity of queen bees, many people think that it will do the same thing for humans. However, there’s no evidence to support this view, and so there appears to be little reason to use royal jelly.

## How to take it

**DOSAGE:** The amount of bee pollen needed to relieve allergy symptoms varies from person to person. In general, start with a few granules a day and increase the dose gradually until you’re up to 1 to 3 rounded teaspoons a day.

**GUIDELINES FOR USE:** Prior to hay fever season, start taking very small amounts of bee pollen each day—a few granules or a portion of a tablet. If you don’t suffer any adverse reaction (see below), slowly increase your dosage until you experience relief from allergy symptoms. Have bee pollen supplements with plenty of water; you can also mix dried or fresh pollen with juice or sprinkle it over food.

## Possible side effects

Because some individuals will have an allergic reaction to bee pollen, begin with a small amount so you can determine if it will have an adverse effect on you. Watch for hives, itchy throat, skin flushing, wheezing, or headache. Discontinue it immediately if any of these side effects occur.

## Case History

### A KILLER DRINK

*From childhood, Jerry H., a bond trader, knew he was deathly allergic to bee stings and avoided the buzzing, venom-carrying insects like the plague. But, surprisingly, it was a health-food drink that almost killed him.*

*As was his habit, Jerry often skipped lunch while he worked and then stopped at his favorite health-food store on the way home for a quick pick-me-up.*

*On the fateful day, he took the advice of an enthusiastic clerk and ordered “The Kitchen Sink Smoothie,” a special new yogurt drink. Little did he realize it contained a generous scoop of some “energizing” bee product in addition to the touted ginseng, spirulina, and wheatgrass.*

*The last thing Jerry remembers about his close brush with oblivion was “putting the glass to my lips.” When he awoke, he found himself in an intensive care unit recovering from anaphylactic shock. His advice to others with a bee allergy: “Watch those healthy drinks. They can be lethal.”*

*The three types of bee products on the market are royal jelly (left), propolis (center), and bee pollen (right).*

