# **Bee Pollen**

#### Subjects: Primary Health Care

Contributor: Jari S. Algethami, Aida A. Abd El-Wahed, Mohamed H. Elashal, Hanan R. Ahmed, Esraa H. Elshafiey, Eslam M. Omar, Yahya Al Naggar, Ahmed F. Algethami, Qiyang Shou, Sultan M. Alsharif, Baojun Xu, Awad A. Shehata, Zhiming Guo, Shaden A. M. Khalifa, Kai Wang, Hesham R. El-Seedi

Bee pollen is a natural cocktail of floral nectar, flower pollen, enzymes, and salivary secretions produced by honeybees. Bee pollen is one of the bee products most enriched in proteins, polysaccharides, polyphenols, lipids, minerals, and vitamins. It has a significant health and medicinal impact and provides protection against many diseases, including diabetes, cancer, infectious, and cardiovascular. Bee pollen is commonly promoted as a cost-effective functional food.

Keywords: bee pollen ; diseases ; functional foods

## 1. Introduction

Consumer expectations of natural products have been rising due to their proven nutritional value. Food manufacturers are also responding to the health trend of "you are what you eat", especially in the areas of functional and health-beneficial products, for both prevention and treatment. The honeybee (*Apis mellifera* L.) produces several beneficial entities, including honey, propolis, royal jelly, bee venom, bee pollen, beehive air, and beebread. These products have been used in traditional medicine for thousands of years, and there is increasing interest in their application in modern medicine [1][2] [3][4][5][6][2][8][9].

Bee pollen is a combination of floral nectar, flower pollen, and enzymes, as well as salivary secretions from honeybees <sup>[4]</sup>. It contains a wide range of secondary metabolites, including proteins, carbohydrates, fatty acids, vitamins, polyphenols, phytosterols, carotenoid pigments, enzymes, and co-enzymes. Pollen's secondary metabolites have antibacterial, antioxidant, anti-atherosclerotic, anticancer, antiallergenic, anti-fungicidal, chemopreventive, hepatoprotective, and immunomodulatory effects <sup>[10]</sup>.

Bee pollen has played a role in combating metabolic disorders such as diabetes, obesity, hyper-dyslipidemia, and related cardiovascular complications <sup>[4]</sup>.

In addition to the nutritive value of bee pollen, it also has a physicochemical composition (water, protein, and lipid content) and techno-functional properties (protein solubility, carbohydrate solubility, and emulsifying ability) that facilitate its food application. Additionally, its capacity to absorb oil allows it to function as a flavor retainer and mouthfeel enhancer, and contribute to consistency characteristics and the creation of product structures <sup>[11]</sup>.

Bee pollen products have recently been developed as granules, pills, candy bars, oral liquids, and human tonics <sup>[12]</sup>. The natural antioxidant capacity of bee pollen enhances food preservation via the prevention of lipid oxidation <sup>[13]</sup>. Bee pollen is recognized as a medicinal commodity in Germany <sup>[14]</sup>. The usage of bee pollen in yogurt increases the shelf life and improves its appearance, taste, odor, and cohesiveness <sup>[15]</sup>.

Moreover, bee pollen could be used in the cosmetic field, protecting cells from abnormal melanogenesis in skin disorders, and eliminating age spots, freckles, melasma, and malignant melanoma <sup>[16]</sup>.

## 2. Application of Bee Pollen

### 2.1. Prostatitis Diseases

Prostatitis, or inflammation of the prostate, is a common condition that can be caused by bacterial or non-bacterial pathogenic causes [17]. In an in vivo study, pollen was found to have the ability to suppress various inflammatory pathways, including nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells (NF- $\kappa$ B), prostaglandin E2 (PGE2), and malondialdehyde (MDA) [17]. *Brassica campestris* pollen could help rats with prostate hyperplasia by affecting the expression of miRNAs including rno-miR184, which rose as the prostate improved [18]. In addition, four weeks of

administration of bee pollen or date palm suspension (100 mg/kg) improved male reproductive parameters such as testis weight, testosterone, luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), as well as spermatogenesis, motility, and viability, in STZ-induced diabetic Wistar male rats <sup>[19]</sup>.

As stated **Figure 1**, sixteen patents were filed between 1994 and 2021 on the use of bee pollen to improve prostate function, in the form of tablets, capsules, suspensions, powders, drops, and solutions. The composition includes bee pollen coupled with other natural sources (e.g., plants and bee products). The formulations can be used to treat several disorders associated with prostatic hyperplasia by reducing the prostate volume and alleviating lower urinary tract symptoms. The formulation is used for reducing the effects of prostate inflammation on male sexual function and enhancing male sexual function <sup>[20][21][22][23][24][25][26][27][28][29][30][31][32][33][34][35].</sup>



Figure 1. Bee pollen patent applications.

#### 2.2. Diabetes Disease $\beta$

Bee pollen contains phenols and flavonoids, which inhibit carbohydrate-hydrolyzing enzymes such as amylase and glucosidase, as well as carbohydrate absorption in the small intestine, and decrease blood glucose levels significantly (**Figure 1**). Furthermore, postprandial blood glucose levels were lower after bee pollen intake <sup>[36]</sup>. In mice with diabetes mellitus, oral administration of pectic bee pollen polysaccharide from *Rosa rugosa Thunb* (Rosaceae) (RBPP-P) improved diabetic symptoms and protected the pancreas (Type 1). RBPP-P increased insulin secretion and functions through the stimulation of key transcription factors MafA and Pdx1 in cells. RBPP-P also increased  $\beta$ -cell proliferation, and upregulated the phosphorylation levels of p38, ERK, and AKT <sup>[37]</sup>. The phenolic compounds from bee pollen *Camellia sinensis* L. extract, including 3-*O*-[2',6'-di-*O*-(trans-p-coumaroyl)- $\beta$ -D-glucopyranosyl]kaempferol, 3-*O*-[6'-*O*-(trans-p-coumaroyl)- $\beta$ -D-glucopyranosyl]kaempferol, and gallic acid (GA), had a hypoglycemic effect for patients with type 2 diabetes. Through interactions with glucose transporters, the three phenolic compounds decrease glucose absorption and transport. In addition, molecular docking showed that phenolic compounds have the ability to form hydrogen bonds with <sub>D</sub>-glucose and amino acids <sup>[38]</sup>.

#### 2.3. Immunity-Related Disorders

The active compounds in bee pollen are vital for boosting the number and activity of humoral immune cells and phagocytes, increasing the number of red blood cells, accelerating antibody formation, and delaying the elimination of antibodies (**Figure 1**) <sup>[39]</sup>. Bee pollen polysaccharide CCP-1 and CPP-2 isolated from bee pollen *Crataegus pinnatifida* Bge improved the phagocytic rates and phagocytic indexes of macrophages. Moreover, CCP-2 stimulated splenocyte proliferation and NK cells <sup>[40]</sup>. Four hundred birds were fed with bee pollen at concentrations of 0, 0.5, 1, and 1.5% for five replicates in a fully randomized model. Immunoglobulin M (IgM) titers increased linearly with bee pollen dietary intake for 21 days, and similarly, thymus weight increased linearly with bee pollen dietary intake for 42 days, indicating that up to 1.5 percent bee pollen could be added to broiler feed until the age of 21 days to improve bird immunity <sup>[4][41]</sup>.

#### 2.4. Chronic Diseases

Polyphenols found in bee pollen have antioxidant and antiproliferative properties, as well as the ability to regulate cell proliferation and cause apoptosis (**Figure 1**) <sup>[42]</sup>. The steroid fraction of bee pollen derived from *Brassica campestris* chloroform extract induced apoptosis in prostate cancer PC-3 cells, resulting in cytotoxicity <sup>[43]</sup>. It has been reported that bee pollen has a synergistic effect with the chemotherapy drug cisplatin, which is used to treat breast cancer, and that it might be used as a supplement during treatment <sup>[42]</sup>. Melissa pollen displayed a substantial impact on the treatment of breast diseases when administered once a day <sup>[44]</sup>. The capsule/tablet also included wall-broken bee pollen and *Ganoderma lucidum* spore powder, which acts as an anti-tumor agent <sup>[45]</sup>.

Heart and coronary artery diseases are examples of cardiovascular diseases. Atherosclerosis is an inflammatory and reactive process in the arteries, associated with high serum cholesterol, oxidative stress, blood clotting, and a disrupted renin–angiotensin–aldosterone system equilibrium. For 16 weeks, 54 ApoE-knockout female mice were fed diets rich in bee pollen ethanolic extract (dosage 0.1 g/kg body mass). The levels of total cholesterol (TC), asymmetric dimethylarginine (ADMA), oxidized low-density lipoprotein (ox-LDL), angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE), and angiotensin-converting factor (ACEF) decreased significantly <sup>[4][46]</sup>.

#### 2.5. Microbial Diseases

Because bee pollen comprises flavonoids and phenolic acids, its ethanol extracts are beneficial against Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, and *Pseudomonas aeurgionsa*, as well as fungi such as *Candida albicans* <sup>[47][48]</sup>. The usage of bee pollen and propolis inhibits the growth and reproduction of bacteria and microbes <sup>[49]</sup>. Wall-broken bee pollen honey wine is a stronger antibacterial agent that can be used to limit the growth and reproduction of dangerous bacteria such as *Helicobacter pylori* <sup>[50]</sup>. Bee pollen contains antibacterial and antioxidant components such as flavones and polysaccharides, and the flavone component can also suppress COX-2 activity in gingival tissues, making it an excellent anti-inflammatory agent <sup>[51]</sup>. Furthermore, bee pollen is utilized in toothpaste because of its ability to suppress germs and also reduce inflammation in the mouth, teeth, and gums, thus preventing and treating oral inflammation, and increasing oral immunity <sup>[52]</sup>.

### 2.6. Applications in Food Industry

Bee pollen is used in food processing due to its nutritive, chemical, physical, and techno-functional properties. It has higher oil absorption capacity than water absorption capacity, low protein but high carbohydrate solubility, better emulsifying properties, and foam depressing activity <sup>[11]</sup>. Black pudding with bee pollen is a natural antioxidant source to prevent lipid oxidation <sup>[53]</sup>. Moreover, its addition to pineapple juice at 400 MPa increased the overall bioactive compounds such as phenolic and carotenoids within 15 min <sup>[54]</sup>. Due to its content of proteins, including essential amino acids, enzymes, coenzymes, large numbers of vitamins, and trace elements <sup>[55]</sup>, bee pollen was used as a food supplement for older horses and prevented the reduction in hematological parameters seen in control horses; it increased the homeostasis of several lipid parameters, and improved the homeostasis of urea and plasma proteins <sup>[56]</sup>.

### 2.7. Cosmetic Applications

Rose bee pollen has a substantial impact on acne therapy when taken as tablets, oral liquid, capsules, electuary, recreational food, or a beverage. It contains proteins, minerals, vitamins, vital amino acids, and fatty acids such as linoleic and linolenic acids <sup>[57]</sup>. Melissa bee pollen acts on skin cell trophism, wrinkle reduction, as well as freckle therapy <sup>[58]</sup>. Ganoderma bee pollen extract maintains skin moisture and smoothness, improves skin tension, and maintains skin youth <sup>[59]</sup>.

# 3. Conclusions

Pollen from bees has been used since prehistoric times due to its remarkable medical potential. Bee pollen has gained considerable interest because of its proven nutritional value, particularly in the fields of functional and health-beneficial manufacturing. Many ailments, including diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, prostatitis, and microbial and immune diseases, have been treated with bee pollen. The use of bee pollen in bread, fried, stewed, and canned foods, pastries, and beverages increases the nutritional value of the product, as well as its antioxidant and sterilizing properties. Scientists should apply the results from patent reports in clinical trials.

However, there are limitations in the use of bee pollen-based products due to their complexity and variability, which highlight the need for standardization before safe therapeutic usage.

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