

A Raw Deal

In a world where sugar is increasingly demonized, people are turning to more natural sources, like honey. But even the golden stuff comes in different standards, with raw honey being a go-to. We sit down with "The Honey Man" Riath Hamed to learn more.

By Yi-Hwa Hanna



A 47-year-old British man of Yemeni origin, Riath Hamed is known to many as The Honey Man. The Founder and Managing Director of Balqees Honey, a UAE-based company that supplies premium, raw Yemeni honey, Riath is also known as a bee expert here in the UAE, as well as a highly acclaimed entrepreneur. Fun Fact: Balqees is the name of the ancient Queen of Yemen, the Queen of Sheba.

We asked Riath to shed some light on what makes raw honey so special, how it can be

a great addition to your diet, and how we can utilise it to its best advantage...

What exactly is raw honey—what types of honey are there, and what differentiates raw honey from the others in terms of its structure and makeup, production, and so on?

Raw honey is honey that comes straight from the hive that preserves the important vitamins, minerals and enzymes, which makes it effectively a powerful

superfood. Raw honey is not processed like commercial honey, so there's no heating or super filtration that strips it of most of the nutrients.

What are the health benefits of raw honey?

Raw honey has many benefits, including the fact that it's full of beneficial enzymes and amino acids; it's anti-bacterial (helps fight superbugs, it's anti-fungal, it's high in antioxidants, and it's an Immunity booster and allergy eliminator.

In a world that is pushing an anti-sugar movement, proclaiming that sugar is bad for you, some experts say honey is a healthier alternative to sugar, while others say that it's still sugar and therefore still 'bad' for you. What are your thoughts on the subject, and if honey is indeed better for you than sugar, then why is that so? How is raw honey better than other types of honey when it comes to the sugar aspect?



on. So raw honey has amazing enzymes and nutrients that help the body rebuild itself and they also help regulate how the body uses the sugar.

Is there a certain way we're meant to store raw honey in order to help preserve the benefits?

Raw honey is heat sensitive, so the natural temperature of the hive can be between 32-35 degrees Celsius, but it can increase slightly. I would recommend that raw honey is kept in a cupboard away from direct sunlight, and it doesn't need refrigeration.

What about cooking—if you cook with it does that remove the benefits? Are there certain ways that are better for retaining the health benefits than others when it comes to eating or preparation? Should we have it hot and cold, eaten alone, in beverages, paired with certain foods...

You can cook with raw honey and get the amazing flavour, but if the heat is above 40 degrees Celsius the benefits will disintegrate. I love having warm beverages and using raw honey wherein you'll still get the fantastic benefits, or using it in salad dressings or drizzled over yoghurts.

While there may be health benefits to it, there is still sugar content in it even if it is 'good' sugar—so how much is too much? How much would you recommend someone consume each day?

I'm the wrong person to ask, as I go through a kilo every week! I would recommend, for normal consumption and to feel the amazing benefits, about 10 teaspoons a day.

Is all of Balqees's honey raw, and if so, why did you focus on raw honey?

We only deal in raw honey because we do not deal in adulterated honey that's been



You can cook with raw honey, but if the heat is above 40 C then the health benefits will disintegrate. I love it in salad dressings and over yoghurt.

heat-treated and stripped of its natural health promoting properties.

Honey comes in so many colours—what are the differences? How do you know which ones are better for you, or which are not?

All raw honey is amazing and the colours and consistency depends on the nectar that the bee forages. So an acacia tree, honey tends to be light and golden with tones of vanilla, and if the bee forages on lavender its more aromatic and its natural sugar content differs, so it becomes more crystalized. The darker the honey is, there tends to be more antioxidants, so it all depends on the flower nectar source that changes the flavour of the honey.

Are there certain types of honey that suit different purposes better, and if so, then what are they?

There are many different honeys that are considered more healing therapeutically and beneficial. The Yemeni Sidr honey and Manuka from New Zealand are incredible for strengthening the immune system and fighting infection tremendously. Sidr honey in Yemen has been used to prevent

and cure many diseases.

How do the health benefits of raw honey compare to manuka honey and why would you choose one over the other?

Balqees buys Raw Manuka honey from New Zealand. Unfortunately, many companies sell pasteurized Manuka honey, which gives little benefit.

Is raw honey always organic or not necessarily, and what's the difference—is one better than the other for the health benefits? What about wild honey?

Many raw Honey companies around the world find it difficult and expensive to certify their honey as organic as it's extra marketing support. But organic and non-raw honey defeats the object of using it as a health food. So raw honey is the key and organic raw honey is a plus if the bee keepers can fund it.

Where are some of the best places in the world for honey? Any regional specialities we should try?

Yemen, Yemen, Yemen, for unbelievable honey! Also, South American honey—especially Chilean from the Andes mountain—is lovely.

As you mentioned, raw sugar still has sugar content (70-80% depending on the type of honey) but the difference from regular granulated sugar (which is a major cause of diabetes and heart disease) is the way the body processes honey in a different way. Normal sugar causes a rapid surge of energy followed by a complete crash, but raw honey doesn't have that "flare effect." Rather, its properties work with your body to give a slow release of energy that can be put to use in playing sports, working, and so