



IS LETTING DOZENS OF BEES STING ME GOOD FOR MY HEALTH?



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Here's a question: what do the first Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne and Gwyneth Paltrow have in common? Now here's the answer: bee venom masks. Yeah. The founder of ['find harmony by inserting a jade egg up your cooch'](#) wellness brand Goop is into that too.

"It's a thousands of years old treatment called apitherapy," said Paltrow in [an interview with the New York Times](#) last year. "People use it to get rid of inflammation and scarring. It's actually pretty incredible if you research it."

Well, research it we have, here at the Blythewood Bee Company blog. And while the claims are certainly incredible, science is still humming and hawing and [outright dumping on a lot of them](#). Cures shingles! yells one clinic. Say goodbye to your arthritis! avers another. Pat Wagner, who prefers to go by 'the bee lady' swears that the toxins saved her from multiple sclerosis. And of course, as with

most natural alternative medicines marketed as cure-alls, bee venom is credited as a scourge against cancer too. The American Cancer Society and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society have issued firm rebuttals.

"There have been no clinical studies in humans showing that bee venom or other honeybee products are effective in preventing or treating cancer," says the former on its website. "Relying on this type of treatment alone and avoiding or delaying conventional medical care for cancer may have serious health consequences."

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society chimes in: "In spite of long-standing claims about the possible benefits of bee venom for people with MS, a 24-week randomised study showed no reduction in disease activity, disability, or fatigue, and no improvement in quality of life."

While apitherapy encompasses a whole host of bee-related substances – from honey, to royal jelly, to pollen – it most often codes for bee venom. Otherwise known as apitoxin, the venom is a complex compound of various active proteins, the principal of which (at a little over 50%) is melittin. This peptide breaks down cell membranes and induces an inflammatory response – which is why it is being investigated as a potential cancer treatment and an alternative for antibiotics respectively. However, for those allergic to the toxin, apitherapy can result in seriously harmful reactions. Worst case scenario, just 0.1mg of venom (the average in one bee’s stinger) can induce anaphylactic shock.

ONE COULD CONCEIVE OF APITHERAPY, THEN, AS A KIND OF COERCIVE INSECT KAMIKAZE-ISM PERFORMED BY CHARLATANS.

Gwyneth is right in saying the practice has been around a while though. Ancient cultures in Egypt, Persia and China are recorded to have dabbled. It fell back into favour through the studies of Austrian physicist Phillip Terc, who published his ‘Report about a Peculiar Connection Between the Bee stings and Rheumatism’ in 1888. A century later, commercial beekeeper Charles Mraz popularized the industry in the United States with the founding of the American Apitherapy Society (which on its website [states](#) it “specifically disclaims any liability arising directly or indirectly from information contained on these Web pages”). Modern distrust in big brand pharmaceuticals, together with a linked uptick in ‘natural alternatives’ trends, has got the ailing public interested again.

Treatments vary over the world, depending upon intended use and resources available.



They can, however, be divided into two broad categories. The first is the ‘bee-on-skin’ acupunctural technique. In this process, the bee is gripped by its head with a pair of tweezers, placed over a patch of skin, and squeezed until its stinger pops out. 27,000 people have undergone this treatment in a clinic on the outskirts of Beijing, and owner Wang Menglin has made his livelihood out of it.

The second treatment method is the more removed, ‘venom-as-serum’ bee botox technique, popular in bourgeoisie beauty parlours for a plumping of skin, smoothing of wrinkles, oh god stop the ageing process effect. The procedure works by placing bees in a glass box, which are then with a small electric pulse, zapped. The zap triggers a release of venom, which runs down the sides and pools at the bottom for some manicured, bloat-lipped clinician to later collect and smear on the faces of wealthy insecure women.

In both treatments, bees die. All of them. This is because the squirting of venom (for most species anyway) is fatal, as half of their abdomen is ripped away with the barb. One could conceive of apitherapy, then, as a kind of coercive insect kamikaze-ism performed by charlatans.

Is it all quackery though? Possibly, but not necessarily. Most promising perhaps will be the follow-up from a [2013 study](#) which found that nanoparticles coated in the venom were effective in “poking holes” in the protective envelope surrounding HIV. The point is, a

whole lot more stalwart research needs to be done before any reliable conclusions can be made. Besides, even if apitoxin does turn out to be the miracle cure for HIV or cancer we've all been waiting for, it won't be through sticking dozens of pointy butts in your face.

Sorry Gwyneth. As with [the \\$244 toothpaste squeezer](#), [the \\$950 toilet paper and colon cleansing](#), we will not be taking your recommendation.



ABOUT US

Blythewood Bee Company is a Bee Keeping Supplies and Honey Bee Removal service located in North Carolina and Georgia. We cater to both sides of the bee world – hobbyists and professionals, online and in-store. Call or visit us today for a free estimate.

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