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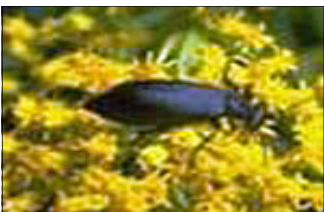
What is Entomotherapy?

As long ago as Egyptian times or perhaps longer, people were using insects as medicines for healing wounds, preventing infections and improving health. Some of these are purely anecdotal, while others have proven basis in fact as tested by modern medicine.

Ants, particularly large ants such as carpenter ants, have been used as wound closures in many parts of the world. Employing their strong jaws, the ants can be applied along a laceration, forcing them to bite into both sides of the cut. The thorax and abdomen are then pinched off, leaving the head intact with the jaws clamped around the wound like a little row of sutures. As the wound closed and dried, forming a scab, the heads would fall off naturally.



There has been much research on the beneficial effects of blow fly maggots in debriding ulcerated wounds. This phenomenon was first noticed on battlefields during the Civil War when surgeons realized that maggot infested wounds appeared to heal much quicker than those not infested. Now don't be too grossed out, as nowadays the maggots used are specially bred and sterilized ones raised in labs under controlled conditions. Not only do they get rid of diseased tissue at the site, but they produce a natural chemical compound called allantoin which has the added benefit of aiding in healing and is also helpful in the treatment of osteomyelitis. In the UK, the use of maggots is more common and has been named biosurgery.



Blister beetles (Meloidae) are so called because of a toxic compound secreted as a defense mechanism. This compound is cantharidin and does actually blister the skin if one is exposed. Interestingly, this same compound was approved by the FDA in 2004 as a wart removal compound. It is also used in the treatment of urinary tract infections.

One of the more frequent usages of insect products involves honey bees. This practice is called apitherapy. Application of honey to a wound has been found to aid in healing through the action of glucose oxidase which converts to hydrogen peroxide, a known wound cleanser. Bee and wasp venom has been used for many years in the formulation of allergy shot serum which is given to those individuals who are allergic to bee stings. There have also been studies on the benefits of bee venom in treating arthritis. Bee pollen has been consumed for years by many who tout its benefits as a source of energy. While this claim has not been proven, bee pollen does contain 55% carbs and 35% protein as well as minerals, vitamins and many antioxidants.

I guess I should end with a disclaimer which cautions the reader not to go out and eat bugs without checking with their physician first!