

Study: This Ancient Remedy May Outperform Modern Eye Drops

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Manuka honey eye drops reduced dry eye symptoms after cataract surgery more effectively than standard artificial tears, with patients reporting notable improvements in irritation, redness, and visual comfort within one month
- › Researchers found that people using Manuka honey improved their dry eye symptom scores by 27.3 points on average, compared to 4.3 points in the conventional eye drop group
- › Unlike standard lubricating drops that mainly add moisture, Manuka honey appears to calm inflammation, support tissue repair, and protect the eye's surface from microbial stress at the same time
- › Dry eye after cataract surgery is often associated with burning, gritty sensations, blurry vision, light sensitivity, and trouble using screens, and these symptoms sometimes linger for months if the underlying inflammation isn't addressed
- › Stable blood sugar, antioxidant-rich foods, warm compresses, reduced screen strain, and lower intake of inflammatory seed oils may all help support the tear film and reduce the risk of chronic dry eye and cataract progression

Long before artificial tears filled pharmacy shelves, people used honey to treat wounds, burns, and infections because of its strong antimicrobial and tissue-repair properties. Now, researchers in Madrid have brought that ancient remedy into modern

ophthalmology, testing whether Manuka honey eye drops could outperform the standard treatment given to patients recovering from cataract surgery.¹

Dry eye disease affects a large share of adults worldwide and an even greater proportion of older populations. Cataract surgery, despite its reputation for restoring crisp vision, frequently leaves patients with burning, gritty, watery eyes that struggle with reading, screens, and bright light. For a meaningful portion of patients, that discomfort lingers for months.

Standard care typically relies on lubricating drops, steroids, and anti-inflammatory medications. These add moisture but do little to repair the damaged ocular surface driving the irritation in the first place. That's where Manuka honey appears to behave differently.

Rather than simply wetting the eye, it seems to address the underlying problem, calming inflammation, supporting tissue repair, and protecting vulnerable tissue from microbial stress all at once. The Spanish trial put that idea to a direct test, and the results were notable enough to help explain why this old folk remedy is suddenly drawing serious scientific attention.

Natural Eye Relief Showed Stronger Results Than Standard Drops in This Study

Cataract surgery temporarily disrupts the eye's surface barrier, leaving tissue more vulnerable to irritation and microbial stress. Manuka honey has long been used in wound care because it blocks the growth of harmful microbes while supporting tissue regeneration. Published in *Frontiers in Ophthalmology*, the 2026 study followed 53 adults recovering from cataract surgery.

Researchers compared two groups: one used Manuka honey eye drops, while the other used standard sodium hyaluronate artificial tears.² Every participant used their assigned drops four times daily for one month after surgery alongside standard postoperative

medications. The researchers tracked symptom severity, redness, tear stability, and visual function at multiple time points to see which intervention provided stronger relief.

- **People using Manuka honey started with worse symptoms but finished with better results** — At the beginning of the study, the Manuka group had significantly worse dry eye scores than the control group. Yet by the one-month mark, the situation completely reversed. Patients using Manuka honey reported lower symptom scores than those using conventional lubricating drops.

Researchers described the improvement as statistically significant even after adjusting for differences like sex and baseline symptom severity. Participants using Manuka honey improved their Ocular Surface Disease Index, or OSDI, score by an average of 27.3 points, while the sodium hyaluronate group improved 4.3 points. OSDI is a questionnaire doctors use to measure how badly dry eye interferes with everyday life.*

It covers problems like blurry vision, eye discomfort, light sensitivity, and trouble reading or using screens. A larger drop means symptoms became less disruptive. For many people, that level of change means the difference between constantly noticing eye irritation and barely thinking about it at all.

- **Visible inflammation also dropped in the Manuka group** — Researchers measured redness in the whites of the eyes (called conjunctival redness), which is caused by irritation and inflammation. Patients using Manuka honey actually reduced redness below their starting levels, while the control group experienced increased redness after surgery.*
- **The timing of the improvements mattered** — Cataract surgery frequently triggers a surge of dry eye symptoms during the first several days after the procedure. In many patients, irritation lingers for months. Yet the Manuka group showed progressive improvement across the study period instead of worsening symptoms.

At one month, the difference between groups became more pronounced. If your eyes feel scratchy, watery, or exhausted after surgery, that shorter recovery window becomes extremely important because it affects reading, driving, sleep, and screen use every single day.

- **Not every measurement improved equally** — Researchers also timed how long tears stayed evenly spread across the eye before drying, a measure called tear break-up time. Your tear film has three layers: a watery middle, a mucin base that helps it stick to your eye, and an oily top layer that prevents evaporation.

The Manuka group showed better numbers overall, but the differences didn't reach statistical significance. Even so, the direction of change still favored Manuka honey. Tear stability improved slightly in the honey group while it worsened in the control group. That pattern suggests the eye surface itself became calmer and healthier over time.

- **Researchers suggest Manuka honey may work by targeting inflammation and tissue repair at the same time** — Unlike standard lubricating eye drops that mainly add moisture, Manuka honey contains natural antimicrobial compounds and unusually high levels of polyphenols, which are plant chemicals with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects.

According to the researchers, Manuka honey may reduce inflammatory molecules that rise during ocular irritation. Those inflammatory chemicals damage tissue and keep the eye surface in a cycle of redness and discomfort.

- **The honey also appears to support physical healing of the eye's surface** — Researchers noted that Manuka honey may promote the growth of fibroblasts and epithelial cells, which are the repair cells that rebuild damaged tissue after injury or surgery. Think of fibroblasts as the body's construction crew. They help rebuild and stabilize tissue after stress.

Epithelial cells form the protective outer layer covering the eye. Faster repair means fewer exposed nerve endings, less irritation, and a more stable tear film.

Calm the Inflammation That Dries Out Your Eyes

Dry eye after cataract surgery starts when the eye's surface becomes inflamed and unstable. Your tears evaporate too quickly, tiny nerve endings become exposed, and your eyes stay trapped in a cycle of burning, redness, and blurry vision. The goal is not simply adding moisture; it's calming the irritation damaging the surface of the eye while supporting repair of the tear film itself.

That's exactly why the Manuka honey study stood out — it addressed inflammation, tissue healing, and microbial stress all at once.

- 1. Use medical-grade Manuka honey eye products to support the surface of your eyes** — The study found that Manuka honey eye drops reduced dry eye symptom scores more effectively than standard sodium hyaluronate drops. Patients using the honey formula reported larger improvements in irritation, redness, and visual comfort within one month. Unlike conventional drops that mainly lubricate, Manuka honey, research suggests, may actively support healing.

Medical-grade Manuka honey contains antimicrobial compounds and high levels of polyphenols that may reduce inflammatory chemicals irritating the eye surface. It also supports fibroblasts and epithelial cells, the repair cells that rebuild damaged tissue after surgery. That means your eyes are not just wetter; they may become healthier and more stable over time.

If your eyes burn or sting after surgery, use products specifically designed for ophthalmic use rather than raw kitchen honey. Even high-quality table honey can contain bacterial and fungal spores that cause serious infection on the delicate eye surface. Use only sterile, ophthalmic-grade Manuka honey products formulated and tested for direct contact with the eye.

- 2. Lower the environmental stress that evaporates your tears** — Dry indoor air, constant screen use, and airflow from fans or vents can disrupt tear stability quickly. If you stare at screens for long periods without blinking fully, your tears stop

spreading evenly across the eye. The surface may dry out and irritation may escalate.

Use the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds, and blink fully several times. This habit may help prevent the slow tear evaporation that builds throughout a workday.

Also reduce your time watching screens as much as possible, and place humidifiers in the rooms where you spend the most time, especially during winter. If air blows directly toward your face while you sleep, redirect it. Small environmental changes often create meaningful improvements because your tear film finally gets a chance to stabilize.

- 3. Support healthy oil production in your tear film** — Your tears contain an oily layer that prevents rapid evaporation. Inflammation damages those oil-producing glands, especially after surgery. Seed oils and ultraprocessed foods worsen that inflammation throughout the body, including the tissues surrounding your eyes.

I recommend replacing processed fats, including seed oils, with more stable options like grass fed butter, ghee, and tallow. Many people also notice improvement when they stop eating restaurant foods and packaged snack products loaded with seed oils. Stable fats support healthier cellular membranes and reduce the inflammatory stress disrupting your tear film every day.

- 4. Use warm compresses to open blocked oil glands naturally** — Many dry eye cases involve sluggish meibomian glands, which are the tiny oil glands lining your eyelids. When those glands thicken or clog, tears evaporate rapidly and your eyes feel gritty and irritated.

Apply a comfortably warm compress over closed eyes for several minutes once or twice daily. Gentle warmth softens hardened oils and improves flow from the glands. Afterward, lightly massage your eyelids with clean fingertips to help release trapped oil. This simple routine may improve tear stability and may reduce the constant "sand in the eyes" sensation many people struggle with after surgery.

5. Increase your cellular energy so your eyes repair faster — Your eyes require enormous amounts of energy to maintain a stable tear film and repair microscopic surface damage. Poor sleep, chronic stress, excessive artificial light at night, and unhealthy diet all interfere with that repair process. Morning sunlight exposure helps regulate circadian rhythm and supports mitochondrial energy production inside the cells covering your eyes.

If your sleep improves, your eye recovery often improves alongside it. Adequate protein intake — about 0.8 grams per pound (or 1.76 grams per kilogram) of lean body mass — also matters because your body needs amino acids to rebuild damaged tissue. About one-third of your daily protein intake should come from collagen-rich foods because collagen provides structural support for connective tissues throughout the body, including delicate tissues surrounding the eyes.

6. Support your eye health to reduce cataract risk — Your eyes are extremely vulnerable to metabolic damage, especially from chronically elevated blood sugar and insulin resistance. Over time, excess glucose may damage the proteins inside the lens of your eye, contributing to stiffening and clouding. That process may increase your risk of cataracts, glaucoma, and long-term vision loss.

Stable blood sugar from regular movement, balanced meals, and strong cellular energy production may help protect the lens before that degeneration accelerates.

Also focus heavily on antioxidant-rich foods because your eyes face constant oxidative stress from light exposure, inflammation, and aging. Leafy greens and deeply colored fruits and vegetables supply protective compounds like lutein, zeaxanthin, astaxanthin, and vitamin C that help preserve clearer vision and healthier eye tissue.

Some people also use natural compounds such as N-acetylcarnosine (NAC) eye drops and N-acetylcysteine amide (NACA) eye drops to support lens health and reduce oxidative damage directly inside the eye.³ Preventing cataracts from

developing or worsening protects you from the cycle of surgery, inflammation, and chronic dry eye recovery altogether.

**These findings are primarily from a small clinical study conducted in a postoperative setting. Results may not apply to all individuals or clinical situations.*

This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult a qualified healthcare provider before making changes to your health regimen.

FAQs About Manuka Honey Eye Drops

Q: What makes Manuka honey eye drops different from regular artificial tears?

A: Manuka honey eye drops do more than simply coat your eye with moisture. The research suggested that they may reduce inflammation, lower visible redness, and support tissue repair after cataract surgery. Standard lubricating drops mainly add temporary moisture, while Manuka honey contains antimicrobial compounds and polyphenols that help calm the irritated surface of the eye and support healing.

Q: How much better did Manuka honey perform in the study?

A: Patients using Manuka honey improved their dry eye symptom scores by an average of 27.3 points, while the standard eye drop group improved by 4.3 points. The people using Manuka honey also showed lower redness and greater overall comfort one month after surgery. Many participants went from persistent irritation and blurry vision to notably fewer symptoms during everyday activities like reading and screen use.

Q: Why does cataract surgery often trigger dry eye symptoms?

A: Cataract surgery temporarily disrupts the surface of the eye and irritates the tear film that keeps the eye moist and protected. That irritation can expose tiny nerve endings and increase inflammation, contributing to burning, redness, watery eyes, blurry vision, and light sensitivity. In some people, those symptoms last for months after surgery.

Q: What natural strategies help improve dry eye besides Manuka honey?

A: Several lifestyle changes help stabilize the tear film and calm inflammation. Warm compresses may improve flow from blocked oil glands in the eyelids, while reducing screen time and dry indoor air helps prevent rapid tear evaporation. Nutrient-dense foods rich in lutein, zeaxanthin, astaxanthin, and vitamin C also support healthier eye tissue. Stable fats like grass fed butter and ghee help reduce the inflammatory stress linked to seed oils and ultraprocessed foods — which are better off avoided.

Q: How do you lower your risk of cataracts and chronic eye damage?

A: Your eyes are affected by metabolic health. Chronically elevated blood sugar and insulin resistance may damage the proteins inside the eye's lens, contributing to increased risk of cataracts, glaucoma, and long-term vision loss.

Regular movement, balanced meals, strong cellular energy production, and antioxidant-rich foods help protect the lens before severe damage develops. Some people also use compounds like NAC and NACA eye drops to support lens health and reduce oxidative stress inside the eye.

Sources and References

- ^{1, 2} [Frontiers in Ophthalmology April 27, 2026](#)
- ³ [Antioxidants 2024, 13\(10\), 1193](#)