

**Propolis**

Your patch tests indicate that you have a contact allergy to propolis. This means that you should avoid contact with this substance in the future. Because the composition of propolis varies, you may not react to all products that contain propolis.

Propolis is a resinous substance collected by honey bees from buds and bark. They use it to build and protect their hives. Poplar and pine trees are the commonest source. Propolis is a mixture of essential oils, resins, waxes and flavenoids. Propolis-related substances include cera flava (yellow wax) from honeycomb and cera alba (bleached wax). The main allergens in propolis are the esters of caffeic acid such as benzyl, phenethyl, geranyl, and 3-methyl-2-butenyl caffeate.

Propolis has antiseptic, antibacterial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory and anaesthetic properties and is widely used in ‘natural’ products and cosmetics.

Contact allergy to propolis may result in dermatitis and occasionally urticaria (hives). It can also cause an airborne pattern of dermatitis. The lips may be affected (cheilitis) or it may present as hand dermatitis/eczema.

**Exposure to propolis may occur through a number of sources** **including:**

* Cosmetics such as face creams, emollients, shampoos and lipsticks
* Hair removal waxes
* Oral hygiene products such as toothpaste and mouthwash
* Food products such as honey, glossy coatings on fruits and sweets, and chewing gum
* Dietary supplements

Occupational exposure occurs in beekeepers, violin makers and violinists, in timber cutters especially when cutting poplars, and in shoemakers

**Shared Allergies**

Propolis often reacts along with *Myroxylon pereirae* (Balsam of Peru). Other common shared reactions include colophonium, clove oil and fragrance mix 1, due to shared ingredients such as cinnamic alcohol, cinnamyl alcohol, benzyl benzoate, benzoic acid and vanillin. A shared reaction to beeswax is uncommon (7%) but may occur due to contamination with propolis.

Some steroid ointments and creams contain beeswax but there is usually no problem with this. Steroids containing beeswax include Dermovate cream, Nerisone cream, Nerisone Forte oily cream, Elocon ointment, Fludroxycortide ointment and Eumovate cream. Protopic ointment and Eurax also contain beeswax.

**The list of products containing this allergen may not be complete and does not always include items that may be available outside the UK. Always check the ingredient listing on the product, package or package insert. Ingredient listings may change over time.**