

ANTIBIOTICS ANTICS

When African ants get injured, e.g. when their termite prey fight back, their comrades transport the wounded ants back to the nest for medical treatment. Specifically, an ant will 'lick' intensively (using the finger-like palps in its mouth) inside the wound of an injured ant for about two minutes.

The leader of the research team that made this discovery, Dr Erik Frank of Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, believes this is the first time that an insect species has been found to dress the wounds of other individuals, and that it reduces mortality. "If we didn't allow an injured ant to receive treatment, they died in 80 per cent of the cases, most likely due to an infection." Whereas when ants were permitted to have their wounds licked by their brethren, only 10 per cent died of their injuries.

While Dr Frank said it's still unclear how the licking helps, he believes it is more than just a simple cleaning of the wound. "It could also be therapeutic, so basically a medical treatment where they apply antibiotics or other potential substances for the injured ant." He said that further understanding of this "might potentially lead to possible antibiotics, which could be helpful in our own medical system."

Isn't it interesting that Solomon's injunction to go to the ant, consider her ways, and be wise (Proverbs 6:6), could be so instructive to us today, in a manner surely no-one expected?



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Smith, C., Ants rescue fallen comrades from the battlefield for emergency treatment, abc.net.au, 14 February 2018.

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