

## Seaweed superfood

The sea vegetable has long been used for its health and beauty benefits and is now enjoying a revival in culinary popularity.

These days it's not enough to just 'eat your greens'; you need to make sure that the vegetables you buy are as fresh and naturally grown as possible. Decades of intensive farming have taken their toll on farmland by leeching the soil of essential nutrients. This means that although you may consume the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables, you can still be missing certain vitamins and minerals. One alternative is to turn from land to sea, where the 'sea vegetable' grows wild. The sea vegetable, better known as seaweed, is enjoying a comeback. Seaweed can be used fresh or dry, in capsule form, or as a table condiment, giving a delicate flavour to foods and a boost of nutrients to the diet. Many foods already contain seaweed extracts such as agars, carrageenans and alginates, which are used as thickeners, stabilisers and flavourings. As it is one of the few non-meat sources of vitamin B12 (required for the formation of red blood cells), seaweed is an excellent food for vegetarians.

According to Leslie Kenton, author of *The New Raw Energy*, 'seaweed is the most nutritious form of vegetation on the planet... containing almost the whole alphabet of nutrients.' It traditionally acts to stimulate the metabolism, and has anti-rheumatic and anti-inflammatory properties. Seaweed has positive effects on the circulatory system and can help to lower cholesterol. It is most widely used for thyroid conditions, and use for goitre (thyroid swelling) has been documented as early as in the 18th Century. Seaweed was used in plant medicine by the ancient Greeks and Romans, and was apparently eaten by the Eskimos and Vikings as a rich Vitamin C source to prevent scurvy. A variety of conditions such as tuberculosis, arthritis, colds and influenza can be treated using seaweed.

The high sodium content of salt in processed foods is well-known, but reducing salt can leave food tasting bland. Used as a table condiment instead of salt, seaweed provides all the body salts and only 3.5%



sodium. This can lower water retention in the body. Seaweed goes well with potatoes, eggs, fish, salads, cheese and nuts. It is 70 times more alkaline than apple, and hence a good food to correct the body's acid/alkaline imbalance, effectively detoxing the body, resulting in more efficient food absorption.

Seaweed is a rich iodine source, an element commonly deficient in people with thyroid conditions. According to The World Health Organisation, over 1 billion people are at risk from thyroid dysfunction – usually because their diet is lacking iodine. An increase of iodine in the diet can alleviate metabolism-related disorders such as lethargy and fatigue. Severe iodine deficiency can cause mental retardation in children, although this is uncommon in developed countries. Instead, obesity linked to a poorly functioning thyroid gland is more common, and on the increase. Over 15% of men and women in the UK are clinically obese. In sharp contrast, the Japanese have the lowest level of obesity in the developed world, and seaweed makes up 10% of the average food intake.

In addition to its metabolic properties, seaweed can strengthen immunity, and improve the condition of skin, hair and nails. This is due to the associated increase in blood circulation, and the abundance of nutrients. Seaweed is commonly used in health and beauty treatments, such as baths for joint pain, body wraps for weight loss and masks for purifying the skin. With the rise in popularity of seaweed, many companies have been quick to join the market. As a consumer, ensure that you buy from companies that use ecologically sound methods, to prevent over-harvesting. This way you can also ensure that the seaweed is tested for pollutants.

Seaweed, when harvested sustainably, is clearly an effective and versatile product for food, health and beauty.

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