

# Vegetables from the Sea

By Irene Yaychuk-Arabei, PhD, MH, RNC

*There are several hundred species of seaweed. Only a handful of these kelp, nori, moss and dulse are familiar to North Americans. Seaweeds are nonpoisonous, although not always palatable. We assume that people living close to the sea (e.g., Japanese, Scandinavians, or Irish) consume seaweeds. They are not the only ones, however. Several decades ago, Dr. Weston Price, a dentist, found that natives of the high Andes carried a small bag attached to the neck. In it was a greenish-brown substance, a quantity of which was consumed everyday. The substance was seaweed obtained from coastal Indians. In spite of the difficulty in obtaining such seaweed, these extraordinarily healthy dwellers of the high Andes would not do without it.*

The sea contains in solution every element necessary to maintain healthy life. Thus, seaweeds are considered the most nutritious plants on earth. Their nutritive values greatly exceed those found in other food sources—and are in an organic form that humans can readily utilize. Seaweeds are especially rich in calcium and iodine. It also supplies chromium (essential for glucose utilization), zinc (for collagen strength and healthy skin), iron, potassium, copper, sulphur, silver, tin, zirconium, phosphorous, and silicon (crucial to skin elasticity), magnesium, manganese, boron, bromides, and other trace minerals necessary for health.

The most important nutrient provided by kelp is iodine. This is particularly crucial for inland iodine-poor soil, such as that found in the Great Lakes area of North America and in central Europe. The amount of iodine in sea plants exceeds that found in inland plants by as much as 20,000 per cent. Kelp iodine facilitates the passage of nutrients into the mitochondria (small components of body cells). It also helps to nourish the thyroid gland and maintain good thyroxin balance.

## Improved Metabolism

Thyroid function directly affects body metabolism. Native Hawaiians tend to be stocky and overweight, yet they experience little heart disease or other health problems. They attribute this to lima lip, their native kelp. Both Norwegians and traditional Japanese are healthy people who are also great consumers of sea vegetation.

Often obesity and sub-clinical iodine deficiencies are related. That may be why some reducing diets encourage the use of algae. Calories in sea vegetables are also negligible, and fat content is only from one to

eight per cent. Bladderwrack is often used in “slimming tea” formulas.

A smoothly functioning thyroid also helps to balance estrogen levels. The dietary factor most often associated with breast cancer is the amount and quality of fat intake; however, seaweed may have a protective role in that regard. The Japanese have a very low incidence of breast cancer. However, migrant Japanese in Hawaii (who ate less than one fifth of the seaweed eaten by the Japanese living in Japan) had a significantly higher incidence of breast cancer. According to the Ebers Papyrus, ancient Egyptians gave seaweed to patients with breast cancer.

## Beneficial Intestinal Flora

Nutrients in sea vegetation appear to help cleanse the colon and improve digestion and absorption. A study of fecal flora in the Japanese diet versus the Western diet showed significant differences in the numbers of beneficial aerobic (oxygen-loving) organisms in fecal flora. This is believed to be due to the antibiotic activity of seaweed that destroys harmful anaerobic bacteria.

Seaweed provides organic chlorine compounds that are important in the manufacture of hydrochloric acid in the stomach. The mucilage in seaweeds is soothing to the intestinal tract and promotes peristalsis. The gels in sea vegetables are nutritious and provide roughage as well. Vitamins A, D, and C found in seaweed help to rebuild the mucous membranes of the intestinal tract.

A 1946 Philippine Medical Journal reported the use of seaweed as an anti-helminthic, or destroyer of intestinal worms. During the war, anti-helminthic medication was unavailable, so powdered sea vegetation was used. It proved itself to be 73 percent effective—and non-toxic.

## Antioxidant Activity

Antioxidants keep our cells young, protect us from cancer, and act as a preservative to keep fats from becoming rancid. Lipids from porphyra were analyzed and tested for antioxygenic activity. It was found that components of this seaweed have antioxidant activities similar to butylated hydroxytoluene, (BHT), a preservative used in vegetable oils. Another protector against cancer is the trace element selenium. Many seaweeds, notably porpyra, contain significant levels of selenium.

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## Pollution Antidote

Seaweed is noted for its ability to bind heavy metals and radioactive pollutants. Dr. Yukio Tanaka, of the Gastrointestinal Research Lab at McGill University, demonstrated that kelp may inhibit the absorption of lead, cadmium and radioactive strontium (one of our most hazardous pollutant). 80 to 90 percent of radioisotopes of strontium 90 could be removed from the intestinal tract in the presence of seaweeds. Sodium alginates actually chelate the remaining amount out of the bone structure. So much strontium 90 has been released by nuclear explosions, power plants, and nuclear weapons facilities that it is believed that person has detectable levels in their bone tissue. Various cancers are attributed to this contamination. Seaweeds can serve as a protective agent in a polluted environment..

## Traditional Uses

Traditionally, seaweed has been used in treating arthritis, constipation, nervous disorders rheumatism, colds, and skin irritations. These are all conditions that respond to magnesium, calcium, protein and some of the other highly digestible nutrients found in sea vegetables. Vitamin K, another nutrient found in seaweed, helps to coagulate blood and is most beneficial for internal and external bleeding.

Most commercially available seaweed has been picked in beds far from polluted areas. Do not gather seaweed near a city or polluted environment. Small amount can be sprinkled into soups, stews, or mixed with other seasonings in salad dressings. Seaweed, such as nori, added to beans during the cooking process helps to degas the beans and add flavor. Consult an herbalist or registered nutritional consultant if you are dealing with health problems.

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<http://www.alkalizeforhealth.net/Lseavegetables.htm>

*The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet and in the cause and prevention of disease.*

—Thomas Edison

Breast cancer in women and prostate cancer in men may be partly due to iodine deficiency.

Japanese women consume 25 times more dietary iodine than North American women and have much lower breast cancer rates. This dietary iodine comes from consumption of seaweed and other sea foods.