the benefits of
sea kelp

BY PIP MORTON of Sea Health Products

"I've always believed that if people are given a healthy choice, they will choose it, and if they choose it often enough it will soon be their only choice." – Terces Engelhart, Café Gratitude, San Francisco

Kelp, the vegetable of the ocean, grown in the rich 'soil' of the ocean floor, is rich in many of the nutrients we require to nourish a healthy body. Kelp has been used by humans for thousands of years. Its virtues were recognised by the ancient Chinese, Romans and Greeks, and still today the Chinese and Japanese, Welsh and Irish use kelp in their diet.

Seaweed is a simple plant that absorbs nutrients from sea water through its entire surface, including minerals and trace elements that are converted into a form that is readily absorbed in our bodies.

Kelp contains an impressive number of essential nutrients – around 60 minerals including many trace elements and vitamins. The minerals include iron, potassium, magnesium, calcium, phosphorus, sulphur, natural chlorine, sodium, zinc, copper, selenium, manganese, boron, nickel and cobalt. Red and brown varieties of kelp are good sources of carotenoids (pro-vitamin A) and vitamin C, as well as containing vitamin B1, B2, B3 and some D, E and K. All kelp is high in soluble fibre and essential fatty acids. However, it is the high iodine content of kelp that makes it a 'super-food'.

Iodine, which occurs in a limited number of fruits and vegetables, is found in abundance in kelp. Many people may not obtain adequate iodine from their diet. In the past, a major source has been iodised table salt, but people have been consuming less of this due to concerns about hypertension. By adding kelp to our diet, it gives us about 60-100 micrograms of iodine per day, which is sufficient to prevent goitre in humans. Ingestion of 100 to 200 micrograms of iodine per day is sufficient to prevent goitre in humans.

The low rates of breast cancer in Japanese women may be due to their consumption of seaweed containing high levels of iodine.

Kelp has a long history of medicinal use by both orthodox and herbal schools, stemming back to the ancient Greeks who used seaweed to treat intestinal disorders and counteract goitre – in spite of knowing nothing about iodine.

Later in history, kelp found its way into homoeopathy and herbalism, where it was first used as a remedy for obesity, goitre, poor digestion, flatulence and obstinate constipation.

It was later found to have a remedial and normalising effect on the sensory nerves, arteries, pylorus, colon, liver, gall bladder, pancreas, bile duct, kidneys, prostate gland, uterus, testes and ovaries.

Here are some ways in which kelp acts to help improve total health:

Reproductive Organs. Kelp can have remedial and normalising effects on both male and female reproductive organs. It is of particular help to women, who need more iodine during a menstrual period.

Arteries and Blood. All edible seaweeds promote the function of the parathyroid glands. This means that the minerals in your food – which if you eat kelp should be plentiful – are absorbed and assimilated to best advantage. This particularly applies to calcium, iodine and sodium, which are all important in maintaining the health and elasticity of the arterial walls.

Hair, Skin and Nails. The presence of silicon is said to keep the skin from wrinkling and sagging. Kelp is a good source of silicon and is also an important nutrient for the roots of the hair. The calcium and sulphur as well as the silicon in kelp can aid your fingernails.

Constipation. This can cause excessive amounts of toxins to build up in the bloodstream. Kelp will help prevent these toxins building up, as well as help loosen the toxic substances which would otherwise adhere to the intestinal lining. Taken with water the kelp swells in the gut, and is much gentler on the walls of the digestive tract than many cereal-based laxatives. For this reason it is often used in detoxification programs.

There are many ways to eat kelp. Kelp granules and powder may be used as a salt substitute both in cooking and your shaker. It has a rather tangy flavour, but is an effective substitute for refined salt and is ideal for those on a salt-watching program. Sprinkle kelp onto salads, stews, casseroles and eggs or mix into smoothies and healthy shakes.

WARNING

Iodine in any form may cause or aggravate acne in certain individuals. Iodine toxicity is rare, but excessive iodine intake can interfere with normal thyroid function.

Pregnant or nursing women or anyone with a thyroid disorder, especially an overactive thyroid, should check with a health practitioner before taking kelp.

THE AUTHOR

Pip Morton is Marketing Manager of Sea Health Products, Narooma NSW, a long-established Australian family company. The core product is Golden Kelp Meal, which is hand-harvested from pristine coastal areas, washed, sun-dried and milled into granules.

10 grams of Golden Kelp Meal contains 16.2 mg of iodine (1,620mg/kg). Ingestion of 100 to 200 micrograms of iodine per day is sufficient to prevent goitre in humans.

Kelp meal is available in health food, organic and gourmet retail stores.

For more details visit www.seahealthproducts.com.au

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