In 1904, the famous French biologist Rene Quinton demonstrated that seawater and human blood plasma shared identical nutrient ratios. The French have long been passionate about their sea-based therapies. But as common as seawater and seaweed therapies may sound to seasoned American spa-goers, truly authentic thalassotherapy (from the Greek word “thalassa,” meaning “the ocean”) is a rarity in the States.

“When people think of thalassotherapy, they picture sitting in a large tub filled with water and seaweed or mineral salts. But true thalassotherapy utilizes all the properties and products of the sea in a marine environment—breathing sea air, bathing and exercising in sea water, seaweed treatments and eating well,” says Susan Yunker, RN, spa nurse at Gurney’s Inn in Montauk, New York.

Breathing salt air is one important way to experience real benefits from the ocean. “When the sea is turbulent, the air—full of negative ions—is believed to be sterile. The sea vapor we breathe is full of minerals, which are absorbed through the capillaries in the lungs and delivered to the body. The negative ions quench free radicals. It’s like taking a mineral [pill] in perfect combination,” says Yunker.

But for those of us unable to get to the seaside regularly, seaweed therapies are a viable alternative. “Seaweed concentrates all of the ocean’s nutrients in the same perfect balance for humans,” says Dan Fryda, author of the new book The Ocean Within (Spa Management magazine), due out this month. “Whether eaten or applied topically via micronized seaweed products, seaweed is virtually a perfect sustenance for the body and skin, providing the richest source of minerals, trace elements, amino acids, antioxidants, phytohormones, polysaccharides and enzymes found anywhere in nature.”

From Cold Sores to Cellulite to Suntanning to Wrinkles
Seaweed and algae possess an almost eerie array of super-powered, human-friendly protective substances. Here are just a few of their extraordinary benefits:

- **Anti-aging skin care.** “Because the molecular weight of the nutrients in seaweed is so small, nutrients penetrate to the skin’s basal cell layer. These charged minerals and trace elements (marine ions) ionize and regenerate cells and connective tissue, inhibit free radical damage, stimulate collagen synthesis and stimulate cellular turnover,” says Fryda.

- **Increased tanning and UV light tolerance in the skin.** When Dunaliella algae are stressed by
Home Seaweed Applications

These simple home seaweed therapy recipes offered by renowned expert on seaweed therapies Dan Fryda can be made from seaweeds purchased at your local health food or specialty store. Bear in mind that seaweed must be micronized to break down its cellulose before its nutrients can be absorbed by the skin. A food processor or Vita-Mix will work. Susan Yunker, RN, recommends giving the skin a soft, dry brushing before applying seaweed products to increase circulation and absorption.

- Boil equal parts nori and kombu with just enough purified water to cover. It will become gelatinous as it cools. Add a drop of lavender essential oil, and apply the gel directly to your skin to soothe and hydrate it, or use it as a wound-healing compress.
- Boil dulse chips, then crush them and put them in a sachet bag with some lavender, lime or lemon essential oil. Use the sachet on the skin and in the bath for the same effects as above.
- Crush kombu flakes (which are high in iodine) into boiling water, and cool. Add juniper, cypress and/or rosemary essential oils, and apply for a diuretic and metabolism-boosting effect.
- Add spirulina powder to Dead Sea salts plus a few drops of your favorite essential oil to make a beautiful green bath rich in body-deodorizing chlorophyll and trace elements.
- Put dry seaweed in a blender with just enough water to make a paste. Add a drop of lavender essential oil, and make a detoxifying poultice or mask.

too much ultraviolet (UV) light, viral attacks or starvation, they produce powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory and UV-protective carotenoids. When humans consume this algae, it increases our protective melanin production and our tolerance to UV rays. And Dunaliella supplements—like Elusun by Dolisos America and Solaire by EuroPharma—lend a perfectly bronze undertone to the skin without turning the skin orange the way carrot-based carotenoid supplements can. Another powerful algae-derived carotenoid pigment, astaxanthin, has similar protective and skin-brightening benefits, plus it is a much more powerful antioxidant than vitamin E. Astaxanthin also comes in supplement form, and it is now being included in high-end skin care and food products such as Ecco Bella’s new line of chocolate bars, drinks and skin care products called Health By Chocolate.

- Cold sore, infection and possible STD prevention. A highly effective red algae ointment for cold sores called RMA (red marine algae) from Vibrant Health was developed based on studies in Argentina showing that carrageenins (polysaccharides) from the Gigartinaceae family of red algae inhibit several herpes viral strains. Common red algae carrageenins—gelatinous substances commonly used to thicken toothpaste, ice cream and chocolate milk—were shown in animal studies to block sexually transmitted diseases including herpes and gonorrhea. These carrageenins are currently being tested in clinical trials to find out if they provide women with protection from contracting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

- Weight loss. Kelp (Laminaria), bladder wrack, Irish moss and kombu are chock-full of iodine, and they can stoke a sluggish thyroid, speed up metabolism and assist in cellulite reduction. Kelp can be found in supplements from World Organic and Nature’s Way as well as in Healthy Teas N. 4 and N. 8 from Scarangello Company.

Seaweed Diet Optional

Edible sea vegetables such as nori, wakame and kombu can help inhibit everything from heart disease to stroke to breast cancer in addition to their cosmetic benefits (read more about edible sea vegetables in our May 2004 Wellness article “Under the Sea” by Kim Schoenhals at www.betternutrition.com). But if you’re like me and would rather apply seaweed than eat it, you might experiment with supplements or a home seaweed application (see sidebar).

Next month we’ll look at the leading edge of high-end natural beauty products (including those containing seaweed). Then, in October, we’ll journey beyond the sea and witness two personal transformations from the inside out.

Holistic beauty expert and health advocate Kat James is the author of the acclaimed new book The Truth About Beauty and host of a nationally televised PBS special of the same name, which premiered in the spring. To learn more about her book, special and cruise program, Total Transformation*, visit her Web site at www.InformedBeauty.com. To send questions and read Kat’s replies each month, log on to www.betternutrition.com.
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