

Treasures *of the* TIDE

The wide range of seaweed that flourishes along Britain's coastline has a long history in traditional medicine. Now this marine vegetable is once again being recognised for its amazing health benefits. Here's how you can reap the rewards

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WEIGHT LOSS

Which type? Bladderwrack (*fucus vesiculosus*), a brown seaweed, is useful if you're watching your weight. It's found in inter-tidal zones around most of the UK coastline, but may be sparse and less healthy on wave-exposed shores. "It can be used to make a stock or soup, and the tips are delicious steamed in salads," advises Dr Prannie Rhatigan, GP and author of *Irish Seaweed Kitchen* (€25; prannie.com).

What's the secret? Bladderwrack and its relatives help weight loss in a number of ways. "They're high in iodine, which is needed by the thyroid, the gland that helps to control weight," Dr Rhatigan says. "But too much iodine can be harmful, so it's best to eat small amounts of different types."

Seaweed can also be used to bulk out meals without adding calories. "It's rich in alginate, which has a natural gelling action in the stomach," explains Dr Craig Rose, executive director of the Seaweed Health Foundation (seaweedhealthfoundation.org.uk). "This makes you feel fuller for longer. Plus, compounds called phenols help to slow the rate at which your body breaks down carbohydrates into energy."

HEART HEALTH

Which type? To keep this vital organ working properly, add winged kelp (*alaria*) to your diet. This brown seaweed is found at low waters on exposed rocky shores around most of the Scottish and Welsh coastlines, and the west and south-west of England. "It needs soaking and then cooking for about 40 minutes, but has a delicate taste that is ideal in soups and stews," Dr Rhatigan says.

What's the secret? "Brown seaweeds such as *alaria* are rich in compounds called peptides – these are known to reduce high blood pressure, a major contributor to cardiovascular disease," Dr Rose explains.

The plant is also full of heart-friendly minerals, particularly potassium and magnesium. "These minerals, along with the antioxidants present, help to clear the arteries of fatty plaques, which can obstruct blood flow and lead to heart attacks," explains nutritional therapist Dr Jane Jamieson (enabling-health.com). Also, seaweed is a good substitute for salt, again linked to cardiovascular disease. >

How to forage safely

Want to try harvesting your own seaweed? Consider enrolling on a course such as **Edible Seashore** (East Devon, £95 for one day, foragingcourses.com); **Taste the Wild Coastal Foraging** (North Yorkshire, £70 for one day, tastethewild.co.uk); **Seashore Foraging** (Pembrokeshire, £45 for one day, wildaboutpembrokeshire.co.uk); or Prannie Rhatigan's **Sligo Seaweed Days** (Co. Sligo, €539 for two days including meals and luxury accommodation, prannie.com).



DIABETES

Which type? Channelled wrack (*pelvetia canaliculata*) is one of several species thought to protect against the disease. The brown seaweed is found high on the shore around the southern and western coasts of the UK. "It's delicious with brown rice, seeds, tomatoes and olives," Dr Jamieson says.

What's the secret? "Pelvetia and fucus contain polyphenol compounds, which reduce the speed that carbohydrates are turned into sugar, making it easier for the body to control blood sugar levels," Dr Rose explains. "Pelvetia is also rich in B vitamins, which many diabetics are deficient in, and chromium, which is important for diabetics or those at increased risk," Dr Jamieson says. Studies show that these elements can reduce insulin levels and improve blood sugar metabolism in people with diabetes and weight problems.

RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS

Which type? Irish moss (carrageen) is found on the shores and rockpools of the UK's Atlantic coasts, and becomes jelly-like when cooked. "It's usually boiled with milk to make a blancmange, or with water, lemon and a drop of whisky as a cure for coughs and colds," Dr Rhatigan explains.

What's the secret? "Red seaweeds such as carrageen have been used for thousands of years to treat sinusitis, bronchitis and

pneumonia," Dr Rhatigan continues. "They have antiviral and antimicrobial properties, as well as an expectorant action." Seaweed is also high in antioxidants, which help our bodies fight disease and infection.

There has been extensive research into the respiratory benefits of seaweed: a 2010 study from Cardiff's Common Cold Centre found that using a carrageen nasal spray could stave off colds in their early stages.

SKIN CONDITIONS

Which type? The UK's best-known edible seaweed, laver (*porphyra umbilicalis*) thrives in the upper inter-tidal zones around our coastline. The main ingredient in Welsh laverbread, it offers a number of health benefits. "It's generally cooked with onion and potato as a dish to help cleanse the body of toxins," Dr Rhatigan says.

What's the secret? "Laver contains 30-40 per cent protein - vital for building and repairing skin cells," Dr Rhatigan explains. "It also has essential fatty acids for a healthy complexion."

"Seaweed is high in iodine - generally good for skin, and specifically for eczema and psoriasis," Dr Rose adds. "It helps to lock in moisture and eliminate toxins." And if you don't fancy eating it, you can add specific seaweeds, such as serrated wrack, to a hot bath: the water draws the iodine out so it's easily absorbed through the skin. ◀

Seaweed supplements

• **Salad & Condiment** (£8.95 for 50g, seagreens.co.uk)

These dried pieces of pelvetia - a dried seaweed that may help regulate blood sugar - can be added to soups and sauces, soaked for use in salads, ground in a salt mill or simply eaten as a snack.

• **Pepper Dulse** (£4.95 for 10g, maraseaweed.com) Made with dried seaweed, this seasoning can be used as an alternative to salt, helping to reduce blood pressure.

• **Good 'N Natural Sea Kelp** (£5.99 for 250 tablets, hollandandbarrett.com) A supplement rich in iodine, which is needed for thyroid function, metabolism, skin health and weight control.

• **Seagreens Food Capsules** (£16.95 for 60, oceansofgoodness.co.uk) A blend of three seaweeds to help strengthen immunity, control blood pressure and improve digestion.