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Prebiotic potential seen in seaweed compounds despite setback



By Oliver Nieburg+
09-Apr-2013

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An EU funded project still sees prebiotic potential in seaweed in spite of a negative finding in human trials.

During earlier lab tests, partners of the HYFFI (Hydrocolloid Derivatives as Functional Food Ingredients) project had found certain low-molecular weight polysaccharides (LMWPs) from seaweed fibre increased bacteria and bifidobacterial populations that could be beneficial to human health.

However, a later human trial involving 60 volunteers found that positive changes in microflora were insufficient to demonstrate prebiotic activity.

Potential still touted

Sarah Hotchkiss, a seaweed specialist for Irish CyberColloids, one of the commercial partners on the project, said: *"In general, evidence is required for the selective growth of 'good' species of bacteria Bifidobacterium, Lactobacillus and Eubacterium rectale at the expense of other less desirable 'bad' bacteria, in particular, species of Bacteroides and Clostridium."*

"There are several projects running worldwide and the academic literature suggests that seaweed shows potential."

Lab tests

The HYFFI project is examining whether seaweed fibre has positive effects on the human gut.

Project partners had conducted lab trials with 10 LMWPs, which were cultured on human faeces.

They used gas chromatography to measure fermentation products



Researchers still think seaweed derivatives can aid gut health. Photo Credit: R~P~M

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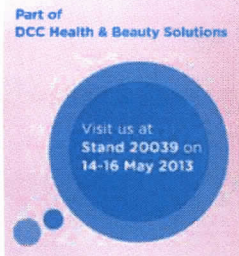
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and found one of the compounds, called CC2238, significantly increased bacteria populations.

A Gelidium seaweed compound called CC2238 also demonstrated a big rise in bifidobacteria, probiotics that have been shown to have beneficial human health effects such as immune stimulation.

Human trials

But a human trial with 60 participants at the University of Ulster in Ireland found there was not enough evidence to demonstrate that these compounds had prebiotic activity in humans

The HYFFI consortium includes Irish firms Cyber Colloids and Marigot, Scottish company Hebridean Seaweed, Spanish-based Industrias Roko and the Universities of Reading and Ulster.

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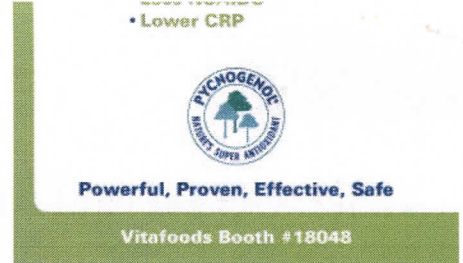


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