



COULD **SEAWEEEDS** BE THE NEXT **SUPERFOODS?**

That's right, it isn't just restricted to the beach  
(or your favourite sushi roll) any more...





If you've ever sucked down a spirulina or chlorella-based smoothie, you're no stranger to the idea that certain members of the algae family are actually pretty darn good for you. But those powerful powders aren't the first algae-based superfood to come out of the ocean—whether you've seen it wrapped around your favourite sushi roll or tossed together in a trendy Japanese restaurant's salad, edible seaweeds have been largely overlooked as a potential nutritional powerhouse by many... until now, that is. Touted as “the new kale”, certain types of edible seaweed such as kelp and nori are packed with health benefits.

“Seaweed contains vitamins A and C, and is also a source of calcium, which is one of the reasons some red seaweed supplements are included as part of some treatment plans for osteoarthritis—such supplements should be taken under medical supervision. However, the only obstacle with consuming seaweed naturally rather than [via a] supplement is [that] serving sizes are often not large enough to get a decent boost in these nutrients,” says Hala Abu Taha, a Dietitian with The American Surgecenter in Abu Dhabi.

“The benefits of this sea green extend far beyond [its] basic nutrition and vitamin content. Research suggests seaweed can also help regulate oestrogen and estradiol levels—two hormones that are very essential in female bodies—potentially reducing the risk of breast cancer. For the same reasons, seaweed may also help to control premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms and improve female fertility issues. Many studies have [also] shown [that] seaweed [can be] a superior source of antioxidants and also helps prevent inflammation, which might contribute to many diseases that include arthritis, asthma, depression and obesity,” Hala continues. Yet despite the

benefits, Hala warns that, as with any food, it's important not to go overboard and that, in some cases, it should be more carefully consumed: “Its high content of potassium might be a good reason to limit the intake for people who suffer from some kidney disorders,” adding: “In addition, seaweeds are also considered as a rich source of iodine. While the thyroid malfunctions without iodine, research suggests too much of the stuff can have its own side effects.” Seaweeds have been a staple food in East Asian cuisine for centuries, but whether or not they can be considered a modern-day “superfood” so to speak is yet to be determined, and experts like Hala insist that the ongoing research needs to

become more conclusive. In the meantime, they're an excellent powerhouse of vitamins and minerals that can help boost your energy, maintain strong bones, and improve your overall health. “In a restaurant, you're most likely to consume it in a small kelp (kombu) salad, simmered into miso soup, or wrapped around a sushi roll. Edible seaweed typically comes in three varieties: brown, red and green. The most commonly eaten (and researched) are the brown varieties such as kelp and wakame, followed by red seaweed, which includes nori (that's what most sushi chefs use) in Asian cuisine,” she says. With so many tasty ways to eat the stuff, we know what we'll be ordering next weekend, then! ■

### GOING GREEN

Eating more seaweed doesn't just have to mean upping your sushi intake—here are some other great (and delicious) ways to get more of the green stuff.

- Add a little crunch to your salads by slicing up strips of

nori and tossing them in and around it. Bonus: It'll add a bit of a salty kick to it too.

- Mix kelp powder (or shred dried nori until it's in flakes) with other spices such as cayenne, rosemary, garlic, or thyme to use as a seasoning.

- Add kelp to heated stock to add flavour to soup bases, or go all out and make kombu (a type of kelp) soup, adding in ingredients like ginger and chicken for a light meal.

- Stir powdered seaweed into homemade salad dressings.

- Make a fresh and crunchy seaweed salad—wakame and arame are your best bet—with other veggies and spices and a sprinkling of seeds.

- Don't want to cook? Snack on dried nori strips! Find them at most Asian grocers.