

SEAWEED

DO YOU NEED IT IN YOUR DIET?

Necessary nutrition or just a passing fad? *TLL* shares the secrets of this slippery superfood

The *Lifestyle Library* caught up with nutritional therapist Monique Parker, who recently worked with some women displaying symptoms often associated with underactive thyroid: weight gain, dry skin, brittle nails, thinning hair, fatigue, constipation, brain fog and feeling cold all the time.

Hypothyroidism

Monique advised the women to get their thyroid function tested with their GP. Hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid) is quite common, affecting 1 in 70 women and 1 in 1,000 men, according to the NHS.

The thyroid is a small, but vital, organ located in the front of the neck. If you think of your body's cells as an orchestra, the thyroid is the conductor and makes the hormones that are necessary for the cells to work normally.

The women's test results came back negative. So, why were they displaying symptoms? Sometimes it can be a case of 'undeveloped' or subclinical hypothyroidism, where there are just about enough thyroid hormones being produced and you're on the fringe of an underactive thyroid. Unfortunately, experts disagree on what 'normal' levels

of thyroid hormones are and what levels indicate a thyroid issue.

Iodine deficiency

Next on Monique's list was to get her clients' iodine levels checked, all of which came back very low. So, what has this to do with the thyroid?

The thyroid cannot make enough hormones if there is not enough iodine and other 'ingredients'. One of the thyroid hormones, thyroxine, is made up of about 65% iodine.

A UK study from 2011, involving 800 teenage girls, showed that 70% were iodine-deficient. The World Health Organisation recommends that iodine deficiency should be corrected through salt iodisation; however, most salt sold in the UK is not iodised, and iodised salt is not used in food



processing. So, we have to ensure we get our iodine from somewhere else.

Good sources of iodine are milk and other dairy products, fish (white fish containing more iodine than oily fish), seafood, eggs and sea vegetables, such as seaweed and samphire. This list means vegetarians and vegans could be at particular risk of iodine deficiency.

The daily requirement for iodine is 150 mcg for adults, and 200 mcg for pregnant and breastfeeding women. One large egg provides about 24 mcg of iodine.

Sea vegetable superfood

Seaweed has become popular in the UK. Apart from being rich in iodine, it's also a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, fibre, vitamins A, B, C and E, protein and polyphenols. However, different seaweeds have different amounts of iodine. Seaweed can provide anything from 16 mcg, to as much as 2,984 mcg of iodine. That's why you need to be careful. Dried nori and wakame are seaweeds with a reasonable iodine content of 21 mcg/gram and 172 mcg/gram respectively; but dried kelp contains, on average, 1,327 mcg/gram and kombu even more with 2,650 mcg/gram.

Too much of a good thing

This means we have to make sure we get enough iodine from our food for a healthy thyroid – but we need to be careful we're not getting too much. Excess iodine can cause some of the same symptoms as iodine deficiency, including goitre (an enlarged thyroid gland), thyroid inflammation or even thyroid cancer.

If you can get enough iodine from your diet, you don't need to supplement. Don't forget that some multivitamin and mineral formulas contain iodine. Vegetarians, and especially vegans, might want to supplement, but Monique recommends getting your iodine level tested (by having a simple urine test) first. Always retest after three months of supplementing. If you already have an issue with your thyroid or you are taking medication, always check with a health practitioner before supplementing.

SPEEDY SEAWEED ROLL

If you're not sure how to incorporate seaweed into your diet, here's an easy lunch idea ...

- Spread some houmous on a nori sheet
- Sprinkle with a bit of tamari and roll it up
- Cover with shredded carrot, watercress, cucumber strips, spring onion or any other vegetable you fancy
- **Extra bonus:** nori is one of the plant world's richest sources of protein!