

High salt levels in food could be banished by seaweed

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High salt levels in processed food could be a thing of the past, thanks to new research which has found that a certain type of seaweed can be used as a natural, health boosting alternative that doesn't affect the taste or adversely affect the shelf life of the food.

In a project that could revolutionise the food industry and improve the health of millions, researchers at Sheffield Hallam University have been working with Seagreens® to develop the use of seaweed granules as an alternative to salt (sodium chloride) in processed food.

Around 75 per cent of our daily salt intake comes from processed foods, with the average adult consuming 50 per cent more salt than the recommended limit of six grams per day.

Too much salt can lead to high blood pressure, which triples a person's chances of suffering a heart attack or stroke. Experts predict that if all adults cut their salt intake down to recommended levels then 70,000 heart attacks and strokes would be prevented each year in the UK.

As well as cutting salt, seaweed also has other reputed benefits and has been credited for playing a beneficial role in a number of common health conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, thyroid problems, breast cancer and cardiovascular disease. Nutritionally, Seagreens® granules

contain an ideal balance of all the mineral salts including sodium at around 3.5 per cent, instead of 40 per cent typically found in salt.

Dr. Andrew Fairclough, lead researcher on the project from Sheffield Hallam University's Food Innovation team explains, "Seagreens® came to us with a proposal for using their wild Arctic wrack seaweed granules as an alternative to salt, but wanted to find out more about how this would affect foods, in particular their shelf life. Our research has found that as well as maintaining the taste of the food, the seaweed granules reduce the numbers of certain micro-organisms thereby helping to, lengthen its shelf life in a similar way to salt.

"In addition to this, Sheffield Hallam University tested the granules for their 'purity' in terms of their microbial load and for any external pollutants, and found that the product is extremely 'clean'."

"When you also factor in the other health benefits of seaweed this has the potential to have a massive effect on the food industry, and to impact on the health of millions."

Simon Ranger, Chief Executive of Seagreens® explains, "Seaweed has already been shown to offer significant benefits in connection with cardiovascular health, where common salt in the form of sodium chloride is contra-indicated. It has now been clearly demonstrated that it not only matches salt in terms of food flavouring and its comprehensive nutrient profile, but that it can also effectively extend the shelf life of food, makes it a real winner for improving the taste and quality of our food on a much wider basis in future."

The research was part of Sheffield Hallam University's Food Innovation Project, which was initially funded through a £1.3 million Higher Education Funding Council for England initiative and continues to run as part of the University's work with companies and organisations. Its aim is to help companies respond to the business growth opportunities created by the healthy eating agenda.

For press information: contact the University's Lorna Branton, head of external communications on 0114 225 5104

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