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Claims of benefit with use of bladder wrack have not been confirmed in clinical studies.

Bladder wrack extract is rich in iodine. Although it is claimed to stimulate thyroid activity to treat obesity, there is no evidence to support this, and data in humans are quite limited.

In one small study, women who took bladder wrack showed improvement in their menstrual symptoms. Other small studies showed only marginal impacts on metabolic and inflammatory responses and that it was no more effective than placebo for osteoarthritis. Topical application of a bladder wrack extract suggest benefits for skin, but further studies are needed to confirm any of these effects.

Bladder wrack is often referred to as brown kelp but it should not be confused with “kelp,” which is another species of seaweed.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Weight loss
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.
- Skin care
A small study suggest topical bladder wrack extract may improve skin elasticity.
- Underactive thyroid
Bladder wrack is rich in iodine and has been used as a supplement for patients with hypothyroidism caused by iodine deficiency. However, this has not been studied in clinical trials and the dosage used is unclear.
- Fatigue
Evidence is lacking to support this claim.

- Menstrual abnormalities

In a small study, women who took bladder wrack reported improvement in menstrual symptoms.

What are the side effects?

Case report

- Consumption of a slimming product containing 20 different herbs including bladder wrack resulted in bladder inflammation in a 33-year-old woman.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

Consumption of bladder wrack harvested from polluted waters may cause kidney toxicity due to the presence of heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium, and mercury.

Do Not Take if:

- If you are taking CYP450 substrates: Bladder wrack may affect cellular concentrations of drugs metabolized by these enzymes. Clinical relevance is not known.
- If you are taking amiodarone: In an animal study, bladder wrack decreased bioavailability of this drug, which is used to treat irregular heartbeat. Clinical relevance is not known.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Bladder wrack - Last updated on June 30, 2022

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