

# Health

## New studies cast doubt on verdict



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### Dear Readers and Particularly Vegetarians:

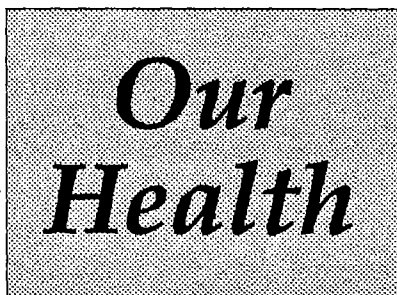
In my column on Feb. 2, 1991, I expressed happiness that I could bring vegetarians good news about an acceptable source of vitamin B-12.

Since writing that article, I have come across two different reports that indicate the sea vegetable sources mentioned can be quite unreliable.

In that column, I stated that sea vegetables were a good non-animal source of vitamin B-12. The ones mentioned and the amount they contain were: three ounces of arame, having between 0.09 to 1.5 micrograms (mcg.) of B-12, three ounces of wakame, having 1.9 to 5.3 mcg., and two sheets of nori, containing 2 mcg. The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for people over 10 years of age is 3 mcg., and for pregnant and nursing mothers the RDA is 4 mcg.

My source for this information was the research work of Dr. B.L. Specker and her colleagues as reported in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Further studies by this group and by a research team of scientists from Harvard School of Public Health and of Brandeis and Vanderbilt Universities alarmed the doctors, when they found that strict vegetarian women who breast-



fed their babies showed no increase in their blood levels of B-12 even though they ate sea vegetables that contained adequate amounts of the vitamin. The doctors express concern because deficiencies of B-12 in infants can subject them to possible long-term brain damage.

A study by Dutch biochemists also found that seaweed products did not correct deficiencies of B-12 in infants, nor did they when the mothers consumed spirulina, a microalgae reported to have adequate levels of the vitamin. The fact that the B-12 present in sea vegetables does not routinely pick up blood levels of this vitamin has researchers going around in circles.

Adult vegetarians in both groups were also found to be deficient in B-12.

In addition, the Dutch group learned that the infants of many vegetarian women have abnormal red blood cells, delayed motor skills, and slow growth compared to control group babies.

A clinical study by Ronald W. Duskin, M.D., also indicated sea vegetables could not be depended upon. In running blood tests on most vegetarians in his practice, he finds about one-third have inadequate B-12 levels — some below 100 pg/ml. Some of these ate sea vegetables and some did not.

He gives patients who have levels below 100 pg/ml B-12 injections once a week for four consecutive weeks and in addition, has them take oral supplementation. Most report noticeable improvement in energy, stamina and overall well-being.

The best source of B-12 is liver. It contains 18 times more than is found in cottage cheese, eggs and milk. However, keep in mind that even the small amounts present in some animal products play an important role in satisfying the needs for this important vitamin.

Vegetarians who use some fish and poultry will not only solve their B-12 needs but will be blessed by numerous other nutrient benefits that these foods supply. Keep in mind that we have been genetically programmed by the diets of our ancestors, going back from 5,000 years ago from some three million years. Because of the earlier involvement with the ice age for a good deal of this time, foods consumed were primarily those of animals.

**We want your  
health ideas**

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