



Glucosamine and Chondroitin

These compounds are naturally occurring materials in our bodies. In addition to water, they are the primary components of the cartilage in our joints. They make up the hyaline cartilage which is the smooth slippery white material that covers the end of the bones within the joints of our bodies. When these materials begin to break down for any number of reasons, then you have a condition we call “arthritis”.

Although these materials are naturally occurring we may need to supplement our supplies, by taking in manufactured forms of these compounds. They are usually derived from either shellfish or cattle. The process removes all other materials (such as proteins, fats, bone, etc.) and leaves just the active ingredient. People who have shellfish allergies are allergic to the proteins found in shellfish, which should have been removed in the processing, and therefore should not have a problem with Glucosamine. However, these patients with life threatening allergic reactions to shellfish should not take these compounds made from shellfish! Diabetics need to be aware that these compounds are similar to carbohydrates and may affect blood sugar readings. If you start these supplements and notice your diabetic management is less stable, stop them and consult your internist. People who need to watch salt content in foods (patients with high blood pressure or heart disease) should be aware that these products may contain salt and can cause fluid retention.

These compounds are referred to as dietary supplements. Therefore, they are not controlled by the FDA (The Food and Drug Administration). Manufacturers do not have to adhere to any standardized processing, labeling or ingredient guidelines. This means that you don't always get what you pay for. You need to read the bottles, do some homework and remember the most affordable brand is not always the best. For an unbiased evaluation visit: www.consumerlab.com. Most manufacturers make the compounds in pill form. The liquid form is absorbed better, however is not always easy to locate.

While this has never been proven, many believe that by taking these pills you can stimulate your bodies' cartilage producing cells to make more of the natural joint preserving cartilage. Clinical studies of people taking these materials have suggested a benefit. They report less stiffness and joint pain and improved function in the group taking the Glucosamine and Chondroitin in combination, compared to those who took the placebo (“sugar pills”) in trials. These compounds have been in use for over 20 years with minimal down side. Their use is indicated for treatment of the symptoms of arthritis; joint pain, stiffness and possible swelling. They are not indicated for prevention of arthritis.

If you are interested in taking Glucosamine and Chondroitin, you can purchase it on your own. Most drug stores, supermarkets and health food stores will have this on their shelves. There is no interaction with any prescribed medicines that you need to be concerned about. The only concerns and warnings were listed above. The daily dose is 1500 mg of Glucosamine and 1200 mg of Chondroitin in divided doses. Most pills have 500/400 mg of each in combination. Therefore, you would take 3 pills per day. You may not notice a difference right away and therefore may want to try it for a few months. If you do not notice any improvement in your symptoms, then discontinue use. You can start and stop it without worrying about side effects. If you do start to feel better, the maintenance dose is just one pill per day. For more information you can go to the library, ask your pharmacist or visit following web sites; www.arthritis.com, www.consumerlab.com, www.aaos.org

Kenneth A. Jurist, M.D. and Joseph H. Guettler, M.D.
24255 Thirteen Mile Road, Suite 100
Bingham Farms, MI 48025
248-988-8085 Phone / 248-988-8565 Fax

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