

The gist of joint supplements in dogs with osteoarthritis

Why, when and how to add these products.

You already have veterinarian-prescribed nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) on hand to help manage your dog's osteoarthritis (OA), but your veterinarian just mentioned giving joint supplements as well.

Why add joint supplements?

Osteoarthritis is progressive deterioration of joint cartilage, which leads to abnormalities in other joint tissues and causes joint pain and disuse. NSAIDs reduce inflammation, relieve pain and are the first line of treatment for OA and for flare-ups. But their long-term use can cause side effects (such as stomach, liver or kidney issues). And we now know it's not just inflammation that causes problems in pets with OA, but oxidative stress (an imbalance between the body's production of harmful molecules called free radicals and its ability to handle them) as well. Preventing, minimizing and slowing the progression of OA should be a top priority in any dog. Oral joint supplements can help in all three areas via many mechanisms, which may also reduce oxidative stress.

Which supplements should I consider?

There are three key players for OA in dogs that help support and protect joint cartilage:

- > Glucosamine
- > Low-molecular weight chondroitin sulfate
- > Essential fatty acids

And many other supplements can be added to complement the beneficial effects of the three key supplements. A few common ones:

- > Avocado/soybean unsaponifiables (ASU)
- > Methylsulfonylmethane (MSM)
- > Green tea extract
- > Alpha-lipoic acid
- > *Boswellia serrata* extract
- > Curcumin (from the spice turmeric found in curry powder)
- > Manganese ascorbate

When should I start?

If you are concerned your dog might develop OA (keeping in mind it is as common in our canine companions as it is



I'm all ready for my walk now.

in people), you may wonder if you should give supplements preventively or wait until your dog has signs of OA. There's a debate about this, but it has been shown that dogs receiving supplements from a young age had less inflammation and lameness. Thus, it makes sense to begin giving dogs both a glucosamine/chondroitin sulfate supplement and an omega-3 fatty acid after they are 6 months of age, especially if a dog is going to be very active, participate in sports or be a working dog.

Before you supplement...ask your vet!

It's easy to become overwhelmed by all the joint supplement choices available through drug stores, pet stores and online. And it's important to understand that oral joint supplements are considered nutraceuticals (foods that provide health benefits), not pharmaceuticals (medicinal drugs). Because of this there is minimal to no federal regulation on supplements' production and manufacturing. A startling majority of companies may not meet the claims made on their product labels, so it's a "buyer beware" joint supplement market.

Thus, it's important to talk to your veterinarian to ensure your dog receives the best product available. Use extreme caution if trying to purchase a joint supplement online. Veterinarians often can't recommend buying joint supplements online because we don't know the product's history—where it's coming from, how it was stored, etc. The bottom line: Use a product from a reputable company in which ingredient purity and the health claims have been verified—and one that your veterinarian recommends.