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Should you take Glucosamine for Osteo-Arthritis?

Question asked by a BWFF forumite:

There has been some controversy about this complementary medicine tablet that is supposed to relieve arthritic pain.

Is it correct to assume that there is no clear-cut evidence as to its use for treating arthritis?

Your opinion, based on your study of the medical literature, will be most helpful. It is a safe bet that some here may be on the tablet. I, fortunately, am not.

On a wider basis is there any benefit in talking a range of complementary medicine tablets?



Answer:

Glucosamine- some swear by it

Once upon a time, I met three friends at a friend's house, and they were taking glucosamine supplements.

I did ask them about the efficacy and the benefits of taking them.

One said, "I feel that the arthritis in the knees, feel better after taking glucosamine for a while": the second said, "I don't know whether it works for me, but I just take it": the third said, "It had no effect on my arthritis of the knees".

Glucosamine and chondroitin for osteoarthritic pain in your joints is mixed, though some say that it relieves OA joint pain and stiffness, others just take it as recommended by a friend, mind you over 60 per cent of the 'feel good' is a placebo effect.

Chondroitin sulphate:

Chondroitin sulphate belongs to the carbohydrate family, is an essential component of articular cartilage. It comes from natural sources, such as shark or bovine cartilage, or it can be made in the lab. Chondroitin sulphate is a combination of chondroitin and mineral salt. Glucosamine and chondroitin are normal components of the articular cartilage and claimed to promote the formation and repair of cartilage.

Chondroitin is hypothesized as promoting cartilage repair due to water retention and elasticity it may cause. This substance attracts fluid into the cartilage like a liquid magnet. Without this fluid, cartilage would become malnourished, thinner, and more fragile. The resulting ample presence of water within chondroitin rich cartilage is supposed to increase the elasticity of the cartilage and thereby facilitates resistance to friction and the forces of impact. This hypothesis of water retention and its benefits have still not been proved. When chondroitin sulphate being a large molecule taken orally is degraded in the digestive system and it is most unlikely that chondroitin per se will be absorbed and dart straight to the joints to facilitate healing of the articular cartilage.

Furthermore, the articular cartilage in the joints have no blood supply or circulation of blood, and glucosamine and the chondroitin sulphate do not reach the site for repair. It is taken only for osteo-arthritis of the joints i.e. the cartilage surfaces of the bones are worn off due to wear and tear, caused by sports injuries, age and genetic factors that run-in families.

There are side effects taking glucosamine, such as nausea, heartburn, diarrhea drowsiness skin rashes, among others.

Such side effects are rare.

It is an OTC supplement, and in Sri Lanka each capsule cost about Rs. 40.

Some people who take glucosamine/chondroitin supplements have reported worse symptoms, and the joints may feel worse than doing nothing.

Those who have shellfish allergies should not take this supplement.

These supplements are not advisable to take if you have diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, among others.

These supplements interact with blood thinning tablets you take such as warfarin.

The bottom-line is that research results suggest that glucosamine/chondroitin are not helpful for pain from osteoarthritis of the knees or hips.

The word glucosamine is coined from the two words- Glucose and Amino acid.

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