

GLUCOSAMINE

Information about one over-the-counter product that brings pain relief to some people.



Osteoarthritis is the most common form of more than 100 different types of arthritis. These types range from milder forms of the disease like tennis elbow (tendonitis) and bursitis to crippling forms like rheumatoid arthritis. Osteoarthritis is a breakdown of cartilage, which is a tough, slippery, elastic material that covers and protects the ends of our bones and acts like a cushion in the joint. When bits of cartilage break off, the result is inflammation, which causes pain and swelling in the joint between the bones.

This is a progressive disease in which the cartilage could gradually wear away in places and the bones may form bumps or "spurs" at their ends. As time passes, more cartilage can wear away entirely causing the bones to rub together and making the joints difficult to move. The main joints affected by this type of arthritis are the weight-bearing joints of the knees, feet, spine and hips although the joints of the hands and fingers can also be affected.

What is Glucosamine?

There are many products on pharmacy shelves that are classed as complementary therapy. One of the most common of these products is glucosamine, a natural product that is often a first choice of therapy when someone is diagnosed with osteoarthritis.

Glucosamine (and products combined with chondroitin) are two of the biggest selling supplements for osteoarthritis. Glucosamine occurs naturally in and around our joint cartilage. Glucosamine is thought to slow the deterioration of the cartilage thus reducing pain and stiffness. The results are not immediate. It may take up to three months before you see positive effects. But if after three months you haven't felt any benefits, then glucosamine probably will not work for you.

Glucosamine supplements are derived from the shells of shellfish like shrimp, crab or lobster. If you have a serious shellfish allergy, you may choose not to use glucosamine. However, most shellfish allergies are due to constituents in the flesh of the shellfish not the shells.

Incidentally, there are two forms of glucosamine available on the market. One is glucosamine sulphate and the other is glucosamine hydrochloride. It appears that the sulphate form works better.

The typical dosage of glucosamine is 500mg three times a day. No studies about the long-term use of glucosamine have been done. Some clinicians recommend giving glucosamine a one-month break after every three months of use. Evidently the effects can persist during this break in therapy.

Use of glucosamine in pregnancy appears safe. However, we suggest not introducing any new medication during pregnancy without consulting your physician. Diabetics should test their blood sugars a little more often after starting glucosamine to ensure there is no great variation in their sugar levels.

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