

My vet has recommended that I use a veterinary joint supplement for my dog's arthritis. He explained the benefits and that this would be a life-long supplement. I understand how it could help but the one he carries is expensive. Can I give her a glucosamine or chondroitin supplement that I can buy at the grocery store or the health food store? Are they all the same thing?

I am glad you took the time to ask because the answer is no. But before I go into the reasons why, I'll take a minute to explain the benefits of the veterinary formulated joint supplements for pets.

Most joint supplements contain glucosamine and chondroitin and some contain ASU. ASU stands for avocado/soybean unsaponifiables, an ingredient concentrated directly from avocados and soybeans that is used for joint health. ASU has been shown to improve joint function and comfort levels. The combination of glucosamine and chondroitin supports cartilage production and helps block enzymes that break down joint cartilage resulting in pain when bone is rubbing against bone. The combination of these ingredients together have been tested and shown to protect joint cartilage better than either ingredient alone. Joint supplements may be used in combination with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory prescription drugs or as the sole therapy for dogs with osteoarthritis or other musculoskeletal conditions.

When choosing a joint supplement for your pet, it is important to select one that has documented research showing its effectiveness as well as a guarantee that it contains the stated ingredients. Unlike many over the counter brands, supplements available to be sold in veterinary pharmacies will contain raw materials of FDA regulated quality and quantity that are continuously tested. The University Of Maryland School Of Pharmacy did a study showing over 50% of tested glucosamine products actually have ingredients in far lesser amounts than the labels state. Some even have zero active ingredients. As this research showed the cheapest products had the least amount of active ingredients, "you get what you pay for".

Many products labeled for dogs or cats are formulated as chewable flavored treats. When you are thinking about giving a supplement for the rest of your pet's life, the ease of a chewable treat is certainly worth the extra expense compared to a capsule or pill you will have to administer every day.

Your veterinarian is correct that your dog will benefit from a joint supplement now and for long-term management. Stick with a high quality product he has experience using and when you see the results, the expense will be well worth it.

Marianne E. Bailey, D.V.M.
South Arundel Veterinary Hospital