



# Glucosamine for Arthritis & Hip Dysplasia

For over 20 years glucosamine has been used to ease the pain associated with arthritis and hip dysplasia. It has proven to be one of the safest and most effective treatments for the sometimes crippling effects of osteoarthritis.

Glucosamine is considered a nutraceutical, falling into the same class as vitamins, and therefore cannot be patented. For that reason there has been very little interest from the large pharmaceutical companies in developing a product. However, because of the overwhelmingly positive results achieved with the use of glucosamine in the treatment of osteoarthritis, more companies are now developing glucosamine products.

The most common joints in dogs affected by osteoarthritis are the hips. Hip dysplasia, common in many larger breeds of dog, greatly increases the rate of degradation of the smooth cartilage lining the bony surfaces of the hip joints. When the cartilage is worn to the point of creating bone on bone contact, the result is pain. This type of arthritis can also affect knees, elbows and shoulders.

Typical signs of arthritis include limping or stiffness, particularly in the mornings or colder weather, which usually improves once the dog has moved around and warmed up. Dogs that respond well to glucosamine treatment are usually middle aged to older, medium to large breeds that are still relatively active. I believe it is important to have movement of the joint to help the body be able to incorporate glucosamine into the structure of the joint. Arthritis also affects smaller dogs and cats that can also benefit from glucosamine treatment.

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Glucosamine is a naturally occurring substance found in animals, the highest concentration being in cartilage. The digestive process makes almost all the glucosamine in an animal's diet unavailable for use. Instead, the body synthesizes most of its glucosamine from glucose, however, as the body ages it is unable to keep up with the demand for glucosamine. This is when supplementation can be helpful.

The most reliable source of supplemental glucosamine is that from the shell of crustaceans, which have a very high concentration of chitin. Glucosamine is derived from the hydrolysis of chitin and because the shells are often discarded they are also a cost effective source of supplemental glucosamine.

How does glucosamine work?

In simplified terms, cartilage contains cells called chondrocytes (among others) and they are responsible for creating new cartilage. Cartilage is constantly being broken down as it is used. An older dog or a dog with hip dysplasia cannot provide the chondrocytes with enough building blocks to keep up with the level of production to replace the old cartilage. Supplementing with glucosamine provides the building blocks for the manufacture of new cartilage.

Are there any side effects?

There have been very few reported side effects over the 20 years that glucosamine has been used. On the very rare occasion a dog will vomit or get diarrhoea when first given this product. Reducing the dose or giving it with food usually alleviates these symptoms.

The safety of this product allows long term use. It is recommended that once dogs have been started on glucosamine and show benefits they stay on it for the rest of their life. Ceasing glucosamine treatment will result in the return of joint cartilage degradation. Usually after the first eight weeks of initial treatment (the healing process) the dose can be reduced to maintain the effects.

Although glucosamine can be used with most other drugs and vitamins with no adverse affects, it is recommended to seek veterinary advice before adding any new product or drug to your dog's regime.

Can I use glucosamine with painkillers?

Many pets will have been prescribed anti-inflammatories for osteoarthritis before they begin glucosamine treatment. Many pets can be weaned off or at least have reduced doses of these medications within weeks of beginning glucosamine supplementation.

How long can I keep my dog on it?

Glucosamine supplementation is an ongoing treatment. Once the damaged cartilage has been healed (up to eight weeks) the dose of glucosamine can usually be reduced to maintain joint health. If glucosamine treatment is stopped you will normally see a return of symptoms.

Can it be used to prevent hip dysplasia?

No, glucosamine treatment cannot prevent hip dysplasia but it may ease the associated pain.

Can glucosamine be used in cats?

Yes, there have also been very good results in the reduction of symptoms in cats affected with feline osteoarthritis.

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### **A joint with Osteoarthritis**

