There are tons of supplements on the market. How do you know which ones are efficacious? One of the first things to do is check for an NASC Quality Seal. Nutramax products are not on the list, but vets still use these products because they have their own rigorous internal quality control system. So, what ingredients do we want to look for in our joint supplements? According to many board-certified specialists along with evidence-based medicine, Omega 3s, UCII, Eggshell Membrane and Green Lipped Mussel are recommended. No supplements on the market will rebuild cartilage, but they can help maintain it. If your breed is likely to develop arthritis in the future or has an orthopedic issue early in life, placement on a supplement is recommended. Supplements are also recommended for active dogs and cats. These supplements are not going to prevent arthritis, but they will help reduce it and make pets feel more comfortable. Make sure you read the label for age specifications. Yu Move is safe for pets over 8 wks of age, so are omega 3s. Movoflex is approved for pups of any age.

Omega 3s have the most evidence of efficacy. Fish based EPA and DHA are more effective than Flaxseed oil for pets so make sure you use a fish derived product. The arthritis dose of Omega 3s is much higher than what is on the label directions and you want to make sure to combine EPA and DHA mgs, DO NOT use the total omega 3s listed on the label. Omega 3s can affect the immune system, cause GI issues like diarrhea and possible vomiting, and they can also affect platelet function especially when used with NSAIDS and Clopidrogel. It needs to be stopped at least seven days before surgery. Nordic Naturals, Vetoquinol omega 3s, Dechra Snip Caps and Welactin are some products I use with my own pets. We always start with a low dose and gradually work our way up to a dose that the pet can tolerate. I normally recommend starting with 1/8 of the dose for about a week, seeing how the patient does, and then gradually increasing over the next month or so. If at any point GI side effects occur as you are increasing return to a lower dose that was OK and let me know.

Dog weight (lbs) Recommended dose (mg) of combined EPA/DHA for osteoarthritis

5 574

10 965

15 1308

20 1623

25 1919

30 2200

35 2469

40 2730

45 2982

50 3227

55 3466

60 3700

65 3929

70 4153

75 4374

80 4591

85 4804

90 5014

95 5222

100 5427

UCII: This is undenatured collagen from chicken sternum cartilage and the most recognized product on the market is Vetoquinol's Flexadin. This will help with mild to moderate arthritis but likely will not help those with severe arthritis. It should help slow progression but likely cannot help an end stage joint. It helps to reduce pain, lameness and stiffness; increases range of motion and improves overall activity. That being said I still use this product with my severely arthritic Aires. If you are giving a product that contains glucosamine and chondroitin, make sure that you are not giving UCII at the same time. I normally separate them by about 12 hours. It will take about 30 to 60 days to see any improvement with this product. Flexadin can be given to small and medium breed dogs over 12 mos of age, large breed dogs over 15 mos of age and giant breeds around 18 mos of age.

Green Lipped Mussel: This must be derived specifically from New Zealand mussels. It has anti-inflammatory effects, improves pain scores and peak vertical force, and may help reduce progression of arthritis. There are TONS of GLM products available. I use Vet Strength Yu Move and Antinol.

Eggshell Membrane: This can reduce inflammation, reduce pain and improve function. I use Movoflex advanced. Movoflex can be used in puppies.

Glucosamine/Chondroitin: This is NOT recommended because studies have shown that it had NO effect on OA patients compared to placebo.

“A 2022 Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Enriched Therapeutic Diets and Nutraceuticals in Canine and Feline Osteoarthritis” found that there was a “very marked non-effect of chondroitin-glucosamine nutraceuticals, which leads us to recommend that the latter products should no longer be recommended for pain management in canine and feline osteoarthritis.”

Therefore, while products like Yu Move and some others contain glucosamine and chondroitin and I recommend those, I am not specifically recommending purchasing glucosamine and chondroitin products because it is not the glucosamine or chondroitin that is benefiting the patient.

CBD: The only product I can recommend is ElleVet because it has been studied. For more info consult the ElleVet website. Please note, CBD products can cause GI upset in pets. I had Aires on this product for years before I realized that his regurgitation was actually linked to this product because when I stopped it his signs also stopped!! I get nauseous from CBD so I thought maybe his clinical signs could be linked to it as well, and they were!

Ursolyx for dogs only: This is ursolic acid and it has been shown to reduce muscle loss. It does not help to regrow muscle, but it will help prevent further destruction of it. Muscle loss is a common problem with our older pets, those with certain disease processes and our arthritic pets. There is a link on my website under OA and Pain to this product. Study findings showed ursolic acid “inhibits molecular mechanisms of muscle atrophy and improves functional performance in dogs.”

Exercise has been shown to reduce pain, improve mobility, keep the joints lubricated and stimulate the brain. For those with hip dysplasia, 60 minutes of exercise daily is recommended. Mini walks/play sessions for dogs and cats with OA may be most beneficial. Protein requirements for older dogs, as long as not contraindicated, have also been shown to be twice that for young dogs.

More information can be found on my website under OA and Pain about these ingredients, products, how to score pain, etc etc.