



Joint Supplements Simplified!

Who hasn't looked at the myriad of joint supplements available for horses and been confused and overwhelmed? Hundreds are available as pellets, powders and liquids with numerous combinations of ingredients and a huge differentiation of amounts of active ingredients. Which one to buy is a common question.

The three basic ingredients that you want are: glucosamine, chondroitin and MSM. Choose a supplement that has the highest amount of each of these per dose. If you are comparing products, be sure to compare each product at a standard dose such as one ounce (get out your calculator for this one!). There is no standardization among products for the amount to give your horse for one serving. For some products, an ounce is a serving others may be 2 ounces, 1/3 ounce, etc. Comparing them all at the same measure can help you choose one with high levels of active ingredients.

Which horses may benefit from supplements? Nearly all of them. Young horses; horses in training of any kind; horse being ridden at any level; horses that are competing heavily and/or competing in stressful events such as reining, roping, jumping, dressage, eventing; horses that have already sustained injuries or that have a tendency to be generally stiff/sore; horses that have had surgery on any joint; and all older horses, especially those that have arthritis and any degree of chronic lameness.

What do glucosamine, chondroitin and MSM do? They can help maintain healthy cartilage and joint fluid; can decrease the inflammatory response in joints, can decrease damage from joint inflammation; can make your horse more comfortable and decrease stiffness; and can help decrease the amount of bute or other anti-inflammatory it may need in conjunction with the supplement.

To cut down on the math for you, the following supplements have the highest levels of the three ingredients of interest (all are from catalogs/websites from the companies listed below—not all of the stores may have all of these products, so you'll still need to shop around): HylaSport, Joint Discovery EQ II (Painted Pony Equine carries this product), ReitSport, ReitSport HA, SmartFlex III-Ultra, SmartFlex Repair, SmartFlex Senior, and Tri-Sport. Some of these have additional ingredients that you may be looking for such as yucca, Vitamin C, etc.

Where do you get joint supplements? United Vet Equine, Country Vet Supply, State Line Tack, Smart Pak Equine, etc. are good places to start price shopping. All have websites and catalogs. Even though some products are expensive, you get more bang for your buck (higher quality ingredients that are in a form that your horse's body is able to use instead traveling straight through and coming out the back end) if you purchase well-known brands in the mid to higher price ranges.

While this isn't an all-inclusive discussion of every joint supplement out there, it should give you information to help choose a product to get you started. Horses do not respond identically to supplements! Some are greatly improved, while you may not notice a difference in others. Pick a supplement and try it for a month or two. If you don't think it's helping, choose another one and try it. Palatability can be an issue for some horses. Some companies will accept returns if your horse won't eat their product. Check before you buy.

Will supplementation eliminate the need for medication? No. You will still likely need other anti-inflammatory medication for horses with injuries and chronic inflammation, but may be able to use less and give it less often, if your horse responds favorably to a supplement.