

Glucosamine and Chondroitin for Osteoarthritis

To the Editor:

I read with great interest the editorial by Dr. Felson and Dr. McAlindon (1) giving careful consideration to the efficacy of glucosamine and chondroitin in the management of osteoarthritis.

Recently it seems that the number of patients seeking alternative medicine has increased worldwide. In Japan, without a medical prescription, many patients with articular pain as well as osteoarthritis are taking “health foods” containing both glucosamine (extracted, for example, from crab’s shell caught in the Sea of Japan) and chondroitin (from cartilage of shark). Glucosamine soup is also commercially available. These products claim to help strengthen cartilage and to lubricate joints. Sodium chondroitin sulfate can be prescribed to arthritis patients either orally or parenterally; however, we speculate that almost all orthopedists and rheumatologists, including ourselves, have serious doubts about the efficacy of the agent and that they probably never or seldom administer it to their patients.

There are two excellent articles (2,3), one of which (3) was not quoted in the editorial, reporting the meta-analy-

sis of randomized controlled trials evaluating the efficacy of glucosamine and/or chondroitin in osteoarthritis. We should make note of them for future reference, since the evidence is widely touted but seems incomplete, as Drs. Towheed and Anastassiades mention (4).

Hideto Akama, MD, PhD, FJMSIM
Seiji Saito, MD, PhD
*Institute of Rheumatology
Tokyo Women’s Medical University
Tokyo, Japan*

1. Felson DT, McAlindon TE. Glucosamine and chondroitin for osteoarthritis: to recommend or not to recommend? *Arthritis Care Res* 2000;13:179–82.
2. McAlindon TE, LaValley MP, Gulin JP, Felson DT. Glucosamine and chondroitin for treatment of osteoarthritis: a systematic quality assessment and meta-analysis. *JAMA* 2000; 283:1469–75.
3. Leeb BF, Schweitzer H, Montag K, Smolen JS. A metaanalysis of chondroitin sulfate in the treatment of osteoarthritis. *J Rheumatol* 2000;27:205–11.
4. Towheed TE, Anastassiades TP. Glucosamine and chondroitin for treating symptoms of osteoarthritis: evidence is widely touted but incomplete. *JAMA* 2000;283:1483–4.

[Drs. Felson and McAlindon appreciated Drs. Akama and Saito’s letter but did not feel a response was needed. —Gene G. Hunder, Editor]