Don’t forget to talk to your veterinarian when thinking about starting the use of a joint health supplement. Your veterinarian will often have recommendations, depending on discipline, age of your horse, and medical history, etc., on which ingredients or specific products may be most helpful. Your veterinarian may suggest combining a particular supplement with something else, such as NSAIDs (by mouth or injectable), other injectables (e.g., polysulfated glycosaminoglycans and hyaluronic acid), and/or an exercise program. It is always a good idea to discuss your horse’s health and medical history, etc., with which will help prevent stress to the joints.

If an injury or lameness occurs, you should always consult your veterinarian.

References:

References, continued:
Nutritional supplements abound – products about these ingredients.

Chondroitin sulfate
1.8-6 g/day
Supports production and slows breakdown of cartilage. Improves joint comfort. Inhibits inflammatory mediators. The combination of glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate has been shown in published equine cell research to work better together than either alone. Absorption of chondroitin sulfate especially can vary, so it is important to choose one that has been shown to be absorbable in horses.*
Equine Research: Yes

ASU (avocado/soybean unsaponifiables)
1-6 g/day
Supports cartilage production and slows breakdown.* Inhibits inflammatory mediators. The combination of glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate plus ASU has been shown to work better in equine cartilage cell studies than glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate alone at inhibiting certain inflammatory mediators.*
Equine Research: Yes

HA (hyaluronic acid)
100 mg/day used in OCD study; wide range of manufacturer-recommended doses: 20-300 mg/day
One study found less joint effusion (swelling) compared to horses not taking HA, after arthroscopic removal of an OCD lesion.*
Equine Research: Yes

Omega-3 fatty acids
Study evaluating stride length used 4.59 g DHA+EPA/day; 7.5-19 g/day recommended
Inhibits inflammatory mediators. Slows breakdown of cartilage. May have some analgesic effects. An equine study noted a trend towards increased stride length at a trot.*
Equine Research: Yes

MSM (methylsulfonylmethane)
Equine study used 9 mg/kg/; 10 g/day recommended for joint health benefits
Proposed anti-inflammatory activity in the joint, though exactly how is not known. A study in exercised horses given MSM reported anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits in the bloodstream.*
Equine Research: Yes

Cetyl myristolate
5-7.5 g/day
Said to have anti-inflammatory activity, though mechanism not known. In one study, the lameness scores of horses taking a cetyl-m product improved.*
Equine Research: Yes

Yucca and devil’s claw
Wide range of manufacturer-recommended doses for both: yucca 100 mg-10 g/day; devil’s claw 2-8.5 g/day
Said to have anti-inflammatory activity, though how is not known. Manufacturers warn not to give devil’s claw to pregnant mares as can cause uterine contractions or to give devil’s claw with NSMIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.).
Equine Research: No

*Levels used in published studies and/or recommended for 1,100 lb (550 kg) horse (given orally)

All joint health supplements are not created equal, and many poor-quality products are being marketed. A published study evaluating human supplements found that only five out of 32 products tested met label claim (contained the level of active ingredient(s)), in this case chondroitin sulfate, stated on the label. A more recent published analysis of equine joint health supplements also revealed quality problems. Nine out of 23 glucosamine products failed to meet label claim, with four products having less than 30% of the labeled amount.

So which joint health supplement to choose for your horse? The quality issues make it very challenging to make this decision. How do you know that the product you're selecting contains what the label says it does, plus is safe and effective? Even if the supplement contains what is listed on the label, are the levels of ingredients included those levels that have been found to be helpful? Sorting through what may seem to be an endless array of products to find the optimal product for your horse can be a difficult task.

The good news is that you can use the product label to your advantage. Just take a few minutes and use the guide below, known by the acronym ACCLAIM, when looking at a joint health supplement label to help you make your choice. This same guide can be used to evaluate other kinds of supplements, too.

A company name you recognize
Joint health supplements made by established companies that offer educational material to both you and to veterinarians are generally a better choice over companies that you’re not familiar with and that offer no educational information about their products.

Clinical experience
Look for a company that supports clinical research showing safety and efficacy of its products in horses. Results should be published in peer-reviewed journals to which your veterinarian will have access.

Contents
Ingredients should be clearly noted on the label.

Label claims
The products should not include unrealistic claims. Stay away from products using words like “cure” or “prevent.” Testimonials aren’t necessarily a bad thing, but a company with only testimonials and no scientific data to support its claims is less likely to be producing a quality supplement.

Administration recommendations
How to administer the supplement to your horse should be clearly stated on the label. You should be able to determine how much of each active ingredient you’re giving your horse per day.

Nutritional supplements abound – products for joint health support, a shiny coat, hoof care, and much, much more. And the supplement industry continues to grow. Joint health support products make up a large part of the many supplements available.

Many ingredients have been touted for joint health. Some have been shown effective alone and/or in combination in published equine research, and others have less to back their claimed benefits. Ingredients often found in supplements are listed below. Your veterinarian is an excellent source of additional information about these ingredients.