

Advances in Osteoarthritis

Skip the Supplements?

A few years ago, the large arthritis study known as GAIT delivered disappointing news: Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate didn't ease pain in people with mild arthritis, though the combo did seem to help people with severe discomfort. New GAIT results further erode hopes for the supplements, which don't appear to slow cartilage damage—knees showed similar wear over two years, whether patients took a placebo, a prescription painkiller, or supplements.

Still, the researchers are reserving final judgment, partly because all volunteers' knees stayed healthier than expected. Looking at small differences (not big enough to be statistically reliable), the scientists say that patients on glucosamine alone fared best. Patients on glucosamine plus chondroitin did worst of all—which may mean one supplement interferes with the other's absorption.

Winning Moves

Two studies show how to get the biggest benefit from one of the best tools against arthritis: exercise.

> Researchers know that strength training helps prevent and ease arthritis in the knees; now a review of 18 studies helps **target your efforts**. Strengthening the quadriceps (on the front of your thigh) is key. Use machines, ankle weights, or exercise tubing, or do moves like seated leg lifts—just make sure you increase weight or repetitions as you gain strength.

> Another way to ease joint pain: **Take up tai chi**. When researchers compared the flowing moves with a traditional stretching-focused regimen for arthritis, tai chi proved four times as effective at cutting pain, and it doubled the improvement in tasks like walking and getting up from a chair.

Grape Expectations

Are grapes more than merely tasty? When researchers at Johns Hopkins University tested grape powder on rats with arthritis, treated rodents showed fewer signs of pain than those fed a placebo. The scientists also found that a pain reliever plus grape powder reduced discomfort and swelling more than the pill alone.

The study was sponsored by the California Table

Grape Commission,

so keep an eye out for more studies to confirm the

results. In the meantime, it can't hurt to munch on grapes, or try grape seed extract (available at health food stores).

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