

Osteoarthritis Supplements & Nutraceuticals Guide



Purpose

Over-the-counter dietary supplements and nutraceuticals are commonly used by people with osteoarthritis. This guide summarizes the evidence and recommendations presented in the 2026 VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Non-Surgical Management of Hip and Knee Osteoarthritis.

Clinical studies often measure outcomes using standardized tools. Throughout this guide:

- **VAS** (Visual Analog Scale) measures pain intensity.
- **WOMAC** (Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index) measures pain, stiffness, and physical function related to osteoarthritis.

BEFORE CONSIDERING A SUPPLEMENT...



How to Use This Guide

The evidence summaries below reflect Appendix J of the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline. For most supplements, there is insufficient evidence to recommend for or against routine use. CBD oil is the exception and is not recommended for hip or knee osteoarthritis.

- Use shared decision-making to discuss the potential benefits, harms, evidence, and individual preferences.
- Continue guideline-supported osteoarthritis care. Some supplements may be considered in addition to, not as a replacement for, standard treatment.
- More research is needed to better understand the effectiveness, safety, dosing, and quality of these products.



Vitamins & Essential Nutrients

Vitamins and supplements are commonly used to support joint health and overall wellness. Research on their benefits for osteoarthritis varies, so discuss your goals, safety, cost, and expectations with your healthcare provider.

Supplement	What is it used for?	What does the research say?	What should I know?
Vitamin D	Bone health, joint health, perceived deficiency support	Benefit for osteoarthritis symptoms remains uncertain unless deficiency is present.	If your vitamin D is low, your healthcare provider may recommend a supplement. Vitamin D is not a primary treatment for osteoarthritis.
Vitamin E	Antioxidant support and inflammation reduction	Current research has not provided enough evidence for the guideline to recommend either for or against vitamin E for osteoarthritis.	High doses of vitamin E may cause harm. Talk with your healthcare provider before taking a vitamin E supplement.
Omega-3 Fatty Acids	Inflammation reduction and general health support	Some studies suggest omega-3 fatty acids may improve pain and function, but evidence is not consistent enough to recommend routine use.	Omega-3 supplements can interact with some medicines. Tell your healthcare provider what medicines and supplements you take.



Refer to the full guideline for a detailed review of the supporting evidence and research studies.

Provider Notes

Joint Health Supplements

Many joint health supplements claim to support cartilage, protect joints, or reduce pain. However, research has not consistently shown improvement in pain, physical function, or slowing osteoarthritis progression.



Supplement	What is it used for?	What does the research say?	What should I know?
Glucosamine	Joint pain relief and cartilage support.	Has not consistently improved pain or physical function.	It may not help everyone and has not been shown to rebuild cartilage.
Chondroitin	Joint pain relief and cartilage support	Some studies show benefit, but results have not been consistent.	If you take blood thinners, talk with your healthcare provider before using chondroitin.
Glucosamine + Chondroitin	Combined joint support and symptom relief	Combining them has not consistently provided additional benefit.	Combination products may not provide additional benefit.
Collagen	Cartilage support, joint health, and mobility.	Research has not shown consistent clinical benefit for osteoarthritis.	Collagen has not been shown to rebuild cartilage.
MSM*	Joint support and symptom relief.	Short-term studies suggest possible improvement in pain and function, but the evidence is limited.	MSM is generally considered safe for short-term use, but we don't know enough about its long-term safety.

* Methylsulfonylmethane (MSM)

Refer to the full guideline for a detailed review of the supporting evidence and research studies.



Provider Notes

Botanical & Herbal Products

Many herbal supplements are used to help reduce pain or inflammation. Their benefits for osteoarthritis vary, and some may cause side effects or interact with medications.

Supplement	What is it used for?	What does the research say?	What should I know?
Curcumin	Inflammation reduction and pain relief	May reduce knee OA pain in the short term.	Curcumin may interact with some medications. Talk with your healthcare provider before taking it.
Boswellia serrata	Inflammation reduction and pain relief	May reduce OA pain and improve function in the short term.	Boswellia may cause stomach upset in some people.
Avocado & Soybean Unsaponifiables (ASU)	Joint support and symptom relief	May provide short-to medium-term improvement in pain and function.	ASU may not help everyone. Talk with your healthcare provider before taking it.
Pycnogenol / Pine Bark	Antioxidant support and pain relief	Some studies found short-term improvement in pain and function.	Talk with your healthcare provider before taking Pycnogenol.
Rosehip	Pain relief and inflammation support	Studies have not shown a clear benefit for OA.	Rosehip may not help everyone. Discuss with your provider if Rosehip works for you.
Willow Bark Extract	Pain relief; sometimes called "natural aspirin."	Some studies suggest pain relief, but results are uncertain.	Willow bark may increase bleeding risk and interact with some medications.



Refer to the full guideline for a detailed review of the supporting evidence and research studies.

Provider Notes

Cannabinoid & Integrative Therapies

Some people use cannabinoid products or traditional medicines to help manage pain. Research is limited, and some products may have side effects or interact with medications.



Supplement	What is it used for?	What does the research say?	What should I know?
Cannabinoid / CBD Products	Pain relief, sleep support, and reducing reliance on other medications.	Research has not shown consistent benefit for osteoarthritis.	CBD products may contain THC and could affect drug test results.
Traditional Chinese Medicine	Pain relief, inflammation reduction, and overall wellness	Research varies widely because treatments and products are different.	Talk with your healthcare provider about any traditional medicines you use.

Provider Notes

Refer to the full guideline for a detailed review of the supporting evidence and research studies.

Things to Discuss with Your Healthcare Provider

When considering supplements or nutraceuticals:

- What symptoms or goals are you hoping to improve?
- Tell your healthcare provider about all supplements and medications you take.
- Discuss that supplement quality and ingredient consistency can vary.
- Remember that supplement quality and ingredients can vary between brands.
- “Natural” does not always mean safe or effective.
- Consider whether the benefits are worth the cost.
- Supplements should not replace proven treatments such as exercise, weight management, physical therapy, or prescribed medications.
- Ask if any supplements may interact with your medications or medical conditions.

Key Takeaway

Many supplements are marketed for osteoarthritis, but research on their benefits varies. They may be used alongside proven treatments, but they should not replace exercise, weight management, physical therapy, or prescribed medications.



Refer to the full guideline for a detailed review of the supporting evidence and research studies.