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New-Generation Joint Products Offer More

But you're going to pay more, too. Limit these choices to horses that truly need the added support.

Years ago, when joint supplements first appeared, the choices were pretty simple. You went with Perna, glucosamine or chondroitin. If you wanted a combination of glucosamine and chondroitin, the only choice was Cosequin.

Next came added key vitamins and minerals, anti-inflammatory herbs, unique processing, and more combinations of nutraceuticals. Finally, oral hyaluronic acid took the joint-support industry by storm, helping decrease the need for injectable HA.

In this article, we focus on a few products we think go one step further, incorporating botanical or nutritional ingredients not widely available in other equine products.

Horses who undergo the most pounding will likely be strong candidates for these joint products.

Cutting inflammation, blocking cartilage breakdown and supporting healing are the cornerstones of a nutraceutical approach to arthritis treatment. The four products in this field trial address one or more of these concerns in a new way.

Results

We tried EquuSea supplementation first on horses with chronic arthritic conditions. Most were already on, or had been on glucosamine and/or chondroitin, but with residual pain and stiffness. In every case, there was decreased lameness, more spontaneous movement and better mobility. The response was rated as equivalent to one to two grams of phenylbutazone in every case. Time to response was from two days to two weeks. Two of the horses had been tried on MSM and hadn't responded.

Next, we tackled acute inflammation. These cases ranged from synovitis to acute worsenings of chronic conditions. Again we saw an obvious response, with improvement noted in two to five days. Compared to bute, the response took longer and the pain control was not as good. However, the resolution of swelling and heat was equivalent to bute. Plus, EquuSea's high palatability was a pleasant surprise, given its sea-based ingredients, which horses often object to in feed tubs.

Recovery packs the strongest punch in terms of glucosamine, chondroitin and MSM at recommended dosages of any joint supplement we have seen—double the loading dose of other products. It's therefore no surprise that it performed well with arthritic horses, even at half dose.

To find out if the addition of the plant polyphenols and the MSM were enhancing the response, we compared improvements to Recovery vs. improvements with glucosamine and MSM alone.

One mare with arthritic hocks, ankle and back pain showed equivalent pain response to glucosamine alone in her joints, and no added benefit with MSM. However, with Recovery, she had a noticeable decrease in joint effusion and the back pain also responded partially.

A three-year-old with arthritic changes in both knees and one fetlock improved more than one lameness grade with glucosamine alone and had no further improvement adding MSM. He was sound on Recovery, deteriorating again when taken off of it. He became sound when restarted on Recovery.

A nine-year-old mare with suspected autoimmune-related arthritis responded about the same to high-dose glucosamine and MSM as she did to being on Recovery.

An 18-year-old gelding with multiple arthritic joints had a significantly better response to Recovery than he did to just equivalent doses of glucosamine and MSM.
Improvement held at the maintenance dose.

A 25-year-old mare with marked lameness and extensive ringbone showed better response to Recovery than to equivalent doses of glucosamine and MSM alone, decreased overall stiffness, more time moving around, but still noticeably lame.

Recovery is excellent for arthritis, with a better response than we've seen with glucosamine and MSM.

Rapid Response makes a wide range of claims. We found the time to a response in common arthritic joint conditions was longer than with many joint supplements, taking one to two weeks. We didn't find results notably different than that obtained with glucosamine and/or chondroitin supplements in terms of pain and movement in the involved joints.

However, one filly, retired from racing because of a severe ankle arthritis with beginning fusion, responded extremely well to Rapid Response, better than to glucosamine or Adequan. We also noted that horses on Rapid Response all tended to move significantly more freely overall after two weeks or so on this supplement.

We also had excellent responses with back pain that hadn't been responsive to regular joint supplements. Several youngsters that had been on Adequan for months for stifle or ankle OCD turned the corner rapidly when put on Rapid Response. In fact, the cysts resolved, according to radiographs. How much of this was related to time and repeated Adequan treatments finally working couldn't be determined, but the impression was that Rapid Response had made a difference.

Some of the most dramatic responses came in horses with ringbone that had been lame for months to years and unresponsive to anything except pain medications. The X-ray changes were at least arrested and, in several cases, the excess bone decreased on radiographs.

An incidental observation in a mare being given Rapid Response for multiple joint problems and back pain was that a large callus of bone at the site of a kick sustained a year before began to shrink after about two weeks. After four weeks, it was gone.

A common thread was that this product appeared to be effective in degenerative conditions that involved the bone rather than just cartilage. A Thoroughbred with a severe sesamoid fracture sustained as a foal became pasture sound after a year on Rapid Response and will soon attempt training, although the fracture remains unchanged on X-ray.

A horse with a navicular cyst and wide fracture line, extensive navicular demineralization, for whom euthanasia was recommended, was slow to respond but after seven months had complete filling-in of the cyst with bone and only a narrow fracture line remaining.

At this point, he had improved from grade 4 (worse) to grade 1 (mild) lameness at the walk and was trotting comfortably in a straight line. Whether either of these horses can return to formal use remains to be seen, but even this level of improvement would normally not be expected.

Another added benefit of Rapid Response is control of gastric-ulcer symptoms. One horse with diagnosed gastric ulcers and one suspected on the basis of clinical signs returned to normal eating within 18 to 24 hours of beginning Rapid Response.

The manufacturer recommends simultaneous topical and oral use. We found the product difficult to work with topically. Oversoftening of the skin, requiring leaving the leg open for a while, commonly occurs. Testers who couldn't wrap or gave up on wrapping seemed to have equivalent results by increasing the oral dose, essentially giving the same amount they'd have used on the leg orally. We can't rule out benefits from local application as well, though.

JointSaver performed like a good glucosamine-chondroitin product.

The response to Joint Saver was typical of a good glucosamine /chrondroitin product, with improvements in three to five days. However, we didn't find any notably better response to Joint Saver than these same horses had to plain glucosamine and chondroitin supplements.

Bottom Line

Recovery was our favorite overall with respect to arthritis since, even at maintenance doses, it packs the same punch in terms of glucosamine and MSM as loading doses of other joint products. Its price at this level of use is comparable.

On the other hand, Rapid Response is expensive. That said, it's the best we found in conditions like ringbone that involve proliferation of bone. It's also the only joint product we've used that gave good results with back pain. It also proved helpful with two fractures and severe, refractory OCD.

EquuSea is a good alternative to NSAIDs for chronic inflammation. Use it alone or with glucosamine/chondroitin for more joint support.