



**ORANGE VILLA**  
VETERINARY HOSPITAL  
BOARDING & GROOMING  
714- 637 - 3660

**Dr. Richard E. Dahlem :**  
drdahlem@orangevillavet.com  
**Dr. Jeffrey Horn :**  
drhorn@orangevillavet.com

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[www.orangevillavet.com](http://www.orangevillavet.com)

## **The truth about dietary supplements:**

Many of you take dietary supplements. Sometimes you take them on the advice of your physician, other times on the advice of friends, neighbors, or from a magazine. They are available at your pharmacy, grocery, or health store. But just what is a dietary supplement? What is the difference between dietary supplements and medications? Why is the difference important? Why does my pet need a supplement?

Dietary supplements, otherwise known as nutritional supplements or nutraceuticals, are chemical compounds that are created to aid the body in certain functions. Some examples of some of these compounds are:

- *multivitamins*
- *chondroitin sulfate*
- *glucosamine,*
- *MSM*
- *Echinacea*
- *zinc lozenges*
- *fatty acid supplements*
- *There are many others.*

Companies market these compounds for various purposes, such as:

- *aiding immunity*
- *weight loss*
- *aiding memory*
- *preventing joint pain*
- *helping the skin*
- *preventing cancer*

Creating, marketing, and selling these products are billion-dollar industry. Nutritional supplements do not undergo the rigorous process for approval by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). This lack of testing means two things: that there is no verification by the government that these products work (and don't cause harm) and that there is no verification that what is on the

label is inside the bottle. All dietary supplements are not under any governmental control. Medications, on the other hand, must undergo an extensive approval process. Due to lack of FDA supervision, many of these supplements do nothing of benefit and may cause harm. Also, even if the compound is found to be of benefit, there is no guarantee that the one you buy contains any of the actual ingredients. Usually, these supplements will have sometime on the package or advertisement along the lines of "This statement has not been verified by the FDA."

When choosing a supplement for yourselves, watch out for testimonials. This is when someone states (usually for money) how great the product worked for him or her. Even doctors do this at times. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is. This is certainly true of diet solutions to speed up metabolism. The long-term effects of these products are unknown, and can contain just about anything. Remember that the government is not looking over your shoulder to make sure you're not swallowing something hazardous. Also, more is not better. Broccoli is great in preventing colon cancer, but when a plant pigment derived from broccoli (which was sold in health food stores) was given to beagles and mice, they all got cancer. When choosing a supplement for your pet, the best advice is don't do it. Let your veterinarian make recommendations. Different species react very differently to different compounds, and most supplements are not dosed properly for our smaller companions.

If supplements are so bad, why are they recommended? Although not FDA tested and approved, we have a lot of evidence that some of these supplements, given at the proper amounts, can have great benefit. Here at our hospital, chondroitin sulfate and glucosamine are routinely used for degenerative arthritis. We are just very careful about the products that we use and recommend. For example, for joint supplements, we recommend using Cosequin brand of glucosamine and chondroitin supplement. We have had good success with it and it has undergone testing by outside labs. Also, if the supplement is added to the food, it becomes under the purview of the American Feed Council. This agency tests pet food (see the article about choosing the right food). There will be a guaranteed analysis that will give the minimum and/or maximum level of the supplement in the food.

In short, don't give your pet any medications or supplements that are not recommended by a veterinarian who is knowledgeable about the specifics of your pet. Not all supplements are good for all pets. And remember, supplements, if used improperly may not only not help, but also cause harm. If you want any more information about supplements or nutraceuticals please call or E-mail Dr. Horn.