

Does It Work?

Collagen Products

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON WITMER

Collagen is a protein found naturally in the body that helps form both rigid and flexible connective tissue, like muscles and ligaments, and lets that tissue withstand stretching. But as we age it begins to break down, leaving us with wrinkles, achy joints, and more. Trying to restore our skin's elasticity and our bone health makes sense, but are collagen products we can ingest truly miracle workers? Here's what experts think.

SUPPLEMENTS FOR JOINTS & BONES

WHAT THEY ARE: Made from the skin, bones, and cartilage of animals and fish, collagen capsules and chewables—and even coffee creamer—claim to ease aches and support joint/bone health.

WHAT WE KNOW: Cartilage can get worn down after an injury or from conditions such as osteoarthritis, says Matthew Matava,

M.D., professor of orthopedic surgery at Washington University in St. Louis. “The theory is that supplements help restore that collagen structure of the joint, which would help reduce some symptoms,” he says. Research hasn't definitively proven this, but some smaller studies have found that collagen may help with pain and flexibility.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Sure, though Dr. Matava isn't convinced they work for everyone. There's often a strong placebo effect with supplements, he notes: If patients expect to feel better, they often do. (Don't take these if you have a shellfish allergy.)

BRANDS: **ForestLeaf** Advanced Collagen (\$17 for 120 capsules); **Flamingo** marine collagen gummies (\$17 for 100 gummies); **Vital Proteins** collagen peptides (\$25).

DRINKS TO HELP YOU SLEEP

WHAT THEY ARE: Ready-made drinks or powders that promise more zzz's.

WHAT WE KNOW: Collagen contains the amino acid glycine, which research has shown can promote better sleep by

reducing core body temperature. But there is no research on whether these supplements work—if they do, it's most likely thanks to the sleep-inducing melatonin and magnesium that are usually included in the mix.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Nope. Instead, try a snack of a protein containing tryptophan (like turkey, eggs, or nuts) combined with carbs, which help the tryptophan work to make you sleepy.

BROTHS & POWDERS FOR GUT HEALTH

WHAT THEY ARE: Powders to stir into drinks; bone broth that promises to decrease inflammation, bolster good bacteria, and rebuild stomach lining.

WHAT WE KNOW: Collagen is composed of a bunch of amino acids, and studies have found that some may strengthen

the intestinal lining, particularly in people with inflammatory bowel disease. But as far as collagen's overall effectiveness for GI issues, “there's really no data or rigorous scientific studies on ingestible collagen supplements to go on,” says Lisa Young, Ph.D., R.D., an adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University and the author of *Finally Full, Finally Slim*.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Skip the powders. If you want to try bone broth, think of it as a way to take in protein, which includes collagen—but know that it may not do anything for your gut.

BRANDS: **Thrive Market** Organic Bone Broth (\$6 for chicken or turkey); **Kettle & Fire** Bone Broth (\$8 for beef or chicken); **Bonafide Provisions** Organic Bone Broth (\$12.50 for chicken, beef, or turkey).



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