

MSM: A Look Into the Future of Pain Relief

by Stanley W. Jacob, MD

If you're part of the growing body of consumers that insists on taking a more active role in personal healthcare decisions, you're making choices every day regarding diet and nutritional supplements. Many consumers look for that new, "breakthrough" product that will actually make a difference to their quality of life. One such supplement is methylsulfonylmethane (MSM). It's a stable metabolite of DMSO, a prescriptive compound that was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the US for interstitial cystitis, a painful urinary tract condition. The anti-inflammatory properties of DMSO are well documented, and it remains a valuable, but often misunderstood compound that's now being tested with a number of medical conditions, including severe head and neck trauma. MSM has become popular because it's a non-prescription dietary supplement that retains some of the benefits of DMSO, without the troubling side-effects that include skin irritation and oyster-like breath and body odour.

MSM has definite anti-inflammatory and circulation-enhancing properties. It also appears to provide greater cell permeability that results in improved uptake of nutrients at the cellular level.

Sulphur, a key component to MSM, is the eighth most prevalent element in the human body. It's essential in the formation of the amino acids methionine and cystine and other important compounds, such as collagen for healthy joints and keratin for healthy skin and nails. Most of the body's organ systems are sulphur-dependent. Recent studies document the alarming incidence of sulphur deficiency in several chronic diseases, including HIV infection. Other studies have shown reduced levels of sulfur in arthritic articular cartilage (cartilage in joints damaged by arthritis) in animals as well as diminished sulphate metabolism in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

MSM is one of the richest nutritional sources of sulphur with a level of 34.1 per cent, many times the amount found in glucosamine sulphate or other products for healthy joints. In addition to products containing only MSM, several food supplements incorporate both MSM and glucosamine, which may prove to be an effective synergistic combination.

Personal Experience

As a surgeon and medical researcher at the Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland, Oregon, I have found MSM to be a truly amazing compound. I've used it successfully in treating a wide variety of patients suffering from simple arthritis and joint pain to more chronic conditions including irritable bowel syndrome. I have been able to provide relief in about 70 percent of patients with chronic autoimmune disorders such as lupus, scleroderma, fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis with aggressive MSM therapy. When treating patients at my hospital-based clinic, I often begin with a course of IV therapy, followed by large doses of oral and topical MSM. I've also found it to be useful in the treatment of food and pollen allergies, which is the subject of current ongoing clinical trials.

Because of my extensive medical experience, I am especially sensitive to the purity of the product that my patients consume. Consumers need to be cautious about simply buying what appears to be the least expensive brand.

Like nearly all supplements, there are definite differences in quality and purity. Consult your health care professional for a recommendation.

Many well-known and trusted brands are introducing MSM products. Your health food consultant can help you make the choice.

About the Author Stanley W. Jacob is medical advisor to the supplement industry and is the primary author of the book *The Miracle of MSM: The Natural Solution for Pain*.