A recent study conducted at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis studied the effectiveness of the joint pain supplement Instaflex™ Joint Support. An eight-week clinical trial showed the supplement significantly reduced joint pain and stiffness in test volunteers after four weeks of use. The study was funded by a grant from Digital Direct, distributors of the supplement. Digital Direct has offices in Charlotte and Boston.
Dr. David C. Nieman, director of the Appalachian State University College of Health Sciences Human Performance Lab located at the N.C. Research Campus, directed the double-blind, placebo-controlled community trial. The results were published Nov. 27 in Nutrition Journal.

“There has been a lot of research on some of the single components taken for joint pain, like glucosamine and chondroitin, but those studies have had mixed results with some indicating joint relief and some not,” Nieman said. “Some joint remedies also use high amounts of a single component, which can cause gastrointestinal and cardiovascular side effects. I think the trend now in the diet supplement arena is to use a cocktail of ingredients.”

The “cocktail” taken by those in the study was comprised of glucosamine sulfate, methylsufonlymethane, white willow bark extract, ginger root concentrate, boswellia serrata extract, turmeric root extract, cayenne and hyaluronic acid.

Digital Direct co-founder Brandon Adcock of Charlotte said the ingredients were selected based on existing research that showed their efficacy in reducing joint discomfort, however this was the first study to look at the effect of the combined ingredients.

Nieman and co-researchers Andrew Shanely, Beibei Luo, Dustin Dew, Mary Pat Meaney and Wei Sha, recruited 100 men and women between the ages of 50 and 75 and with a current history of joint pain for the eight-week study. Half of the study group took an Instaflex capsule three times a day for eight weeks, while the other half took a placebo.

Those taking the Instaflex reported a 37 percent reduction in joint pain. The placebo group reported a 16 percent reduction in pain. The decrease in joint pain and stiffness was comparable to or higher than pain reductions reported in other studies that used chondroprotective or anti-inflammatory dietary supplements in subjects with osteoarthritis, according to the research article.

“This is one of the few cocktails using cartilage protection and anti-inflammatory ingredients to be shown effective,” Nieman said.

Nieman added that weight loss remains one of the best ways to reduce joint pain. “A 20-pound weight loss has been shown to decrease joint pain by 54 percent,” he said. “Obviously, if a person lost weight and took the supplement, it’s possible to have an even greater effect on joint pain.”

While dietary supplements aren’t subject to the same FDA approvals or disapprovals as the pharmaceutical industry, Adcock believes clinical studies are important to his health supplement business. “We have had years of anecdotal reports about the efficacy of our product, but wanted to substantiate that scientifically for our customers,” he said.

Nieman’s prior research has focused on the benefits of taking single supplements, but those studies have shown little effect. For instance, studies of the benefits of the flavonoid quercetin, and culinary levels of red pepper and turmeric found few beneficial health effects. “When the joint pain data emerged from our most recent study, I was impressed. I didn’t really expect to see this magnitude of a difference given all the studies we have done that have failed to show effects,” he said.

“In general, I think the data are very impressive,” Nieman said. “This is a healthy supplement with no significant negative symptoms compared to placebo. It’s a natural dietary supplement that works.”