SAMe FOR OSTEOARTHRITIS AND DEPRESSION  by June Thomasson, PA-C

S-adenosylmethionine (SAMe) is a naturally occurring molecule that is found in almost all tissues and fluids in the body, and is essential to more than 100 biochemical reactions. It is manufactured in the body from the amino acid methionine, and related to the metabolism of vitamins B6 (folate) and B12, so deficiencies in these can cause decreased SAMe concentrations in the central nervous system.

SAMe is used for a long list of problems, but has been studied for only a few indications. Initially it was given intravenously or intramuscularly, for depression. When depressed patients noticed improvement in their arthritis, studies began for that indication. It is now available orally, which is what this article will address.

Higher doses of SAMe appear to be as effective for the pain and limitation of motion of osteoarthritis (overuse/getting older joint pain) as are standard doses of the medications naproxen and ibuprofen. Similarly, higher doses of SAMe seem to be as effective as lower doses of some older antidepressants. This indication has been studied more with respect to the injection route. SAMe is possibly helpful for fibromyalgia, and a couple other conditions.

As a natural constituent of our bodies, there do not seem to be major side effects from oral use of this substance, but it can cause diarrhea and a number of other general discomforts. However, people with bipolar disorder should not take this, as there are reports of mania with high doses.

Natural supplements are not tested for potency, but one source comments that enteric coated pills generally have more reliable contents. An enteric coating and packaging in bubble packs are also better for retaining potency. The salt that is available in Fairbanks is the “tosylate”; this substance has a shorter shelf life, so make sure you’re buying from someone who has good product turnover, as well as the better packaging. When synthesized, SAMe is produced in a mixture of the active “S” molecule, and the “R” biologically inactive molecule. (The “S” in SAMe signifies this molecular characteristic.) More expensive brands mention this on their packaging, which may mean they are more likely to have the dose they claim to have.

Dosing is another challenge, as my information does not specify which salt was used (as well as the concerns in the above paragraph). The best recommendation I can find is 200 mg three times daily for osteoarthritis. I would suggest using this dose a month, then doubling if needed and tolerated. For mild depression, a dose beginning at 200 mg twice a day can be tapered up to 1600 mg a day if needed, in consultation with a health provider. For symptoms beyond mild depression, a health provider should be consulted. Again, if you have bipolar disorder, DO NOT USE SAMe; if your behavior changes while taking it, stop it and consult a clinician. Do mention to your health provider that you are taking this and any herb or supplement, in case there are interactions with prescriptions or procedures.