

# Dipeptides and Tripeptides: The Emerging Frontier of Collagen Science

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Standard collagen supplements get broken down to individual amino acids during digestion, but specific di- and tripeptides resist digestive enzymes, enter your bloodstream intact, and may act as signaling molecules that stimulate collagen production, fibroblast activity, and hyaluronic acid synthesis
- › German company Gelita produces target-specific bioactive collagen peptide formulations for joints, skin, and bone, each backed by randomized, placebo-controlled clinical trials
- › The Japanese company Nitta Gelatin first identified these key bioactive dipeptides from within the collagen peptide molecule over a decade ago, and their Replenwell line contains up to 30 times more bioactive dipeptides than standard collagen
- › A 2024 five-arm multicenter randomized controlled trial showed that 2.5 grams of concentrated bioactive collagen peptides matched the efficacy of 10 grams of conventional collagen — a four-fold potency advantage
- › Gelita's consumer-available hydrolysate powder — roughly \$40 for a pound — is currently a practical option, though a commonly studied intake is about 10 grams per day

For decades, collagen supplementation has been treated as a simple raw materials play. The logic is that your body needs collagen amino acids, which your body will use to make new collagen. Simply put, eat collagen, build collagen.

But the research tells a more complex story. And that story starts with what happens to collagen when it crosses the intestinal wall.

## The Discovery of Bioactive Dipeptides

Over a decade ago, scientists in Japan made a discovery that reshaped the field. They were the first to identify specific bioactive dipeptides – prolyl-hydroxyproline (Pro-Hyp) and hydroxyprolyl-glycine (Hyp-Gly) – present at measurable concentrations in human blood after oral consumption of collagen peptides.<sup>1</sup> They used porcine gelatin hydrolysate provided by [Nitta Gelatin](#), which was the first collagen peptide supplier to successfully identify these bioactive dipeptides from within the collagen peptide molecule.<sup>2</sup>

This was significant because conventional wisdom said collagen peptides would be fully digested to free amino acids before absorption. But Pro-Hyp and Hyp-Gly were showing up in blood plasma intact – as dipeptides, not individual amino acids. Radioactive labeling studies in animal models have suggested these peptides accumulate in specific target tissues, including skin and cartilage.<sup>3</sup> Further analysis detected Pro-Hyp in human urine, suggesting these dipeptides resist peptidase degradation in the body.<sup>4</sup>

## Why These Dipeptides Survive Digestion

The resistance comes from chemistry. Proline and hydroxyproline have rigid pyrrolidine ring structures that create steric hindrance, physically preventing digestive enzymes from accessing the peptide bond. This is a structural feature of collagen's unusual amino acid composition – the same architecture that gives collagen its mechanical strength also protects these fragments from digestion.

- **Collagen peptides are absorbed in intact forms** – A 2018 rat study using intestinal perfusion found that collagen hydrolysate was absorbed predominantly as peptides, with total absorbed hydroxyproline-containing peptides significantly exceeding free hydroxyproline.<sup>5</sup>

- **Human trials show consistent increases in key dipeptides after ingestion** – A 2021 study comparing gelatin and low-molecular-weight gelatin hydrolysate showed that ingestion significantly increased both Pro-Hyp and Hyp-Gly concentrations in human plasma, confirming intact dipeptide absorption from multiple collagen sources.<sup>6</sup>
- **Researchers have also evaluated how absorption changes with intake levels** – A dose-response study found that plasma levels of hydroxyproline-containing peptides increased dose-dependently and that the absorption limit was not reached even at the highest doses tested.<sup>7</sup>

## Signaling, Not Just Structure

But the real story isn't just that they survive digestion. It's what they do when they reach the target tissue.

- **Pro-Hyp doesn't just sit in your cartilage as an inert building block** – Research suggests it may support the production of extracellular matrix components like glycosaminoglycans and aggrecan in chondrocytes, the cells responsible for cartilage regeneration. It appears to function as a biological signal, telling cells to make more collagen in that tissue.<sup>8</sup>
- **Glycine contributes through an additional mechanism beyond signaling** – In vitro research using bovine chondrocytes suggests that high glycine concentrations may also support collagen synthesis by articular chondrocytes, supporting a dual mechanism of signaling plus substrate supply.<sup>9</sup>
- **This signaling function separates bioactive collagen peptides from standard collagen hydrolysate** – When Pro-Hyp reaches a fibroblast in the dermis, it doesn't merely contribute glycine and proline to the amino acid pool.

Research suggests it may activate a receptor-mediated pathway associated with increased collagen gene expression, enhanced hyaluronic acid synthesis (which is essential for skin hydration), and increased cell proliferation. The peptide appears to function as an instruction, not just a raw material.<sup>10</sup>

## **Gelita's Tissue-Targeted Portfolio**

The German company Gelita has built an entire portfolio of bioactive collagen peptides optimized through specific enzymatic hydrolysis conditions to produce peptide profiles targeting different tissue types. The same starting material – bovine or porcine collagen – processed under different conditions yields different peptide fingerprints that signal different cell types.

- **FORTIGEL is their joint-specific formulation** – It uses collagen peptides with an average molecular weight of about 3 kilodaltons, optimized to stimulate chondrocytes.
- **Clinical trial data show measurable reductions in joint pain** – In a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial involving active adults with activity-related joint pain, FORTIGEL was associated with reduced joint discomfort compared to placebo over 12 weeks.<sup>11</sup>
- **The effects extended to measurable changes in cartilage tissue** – An earlier pilot study used MRI imaging to detect cartilage tissue changes after collagen hydrolysate treatment – one of the studies to report structural cartilage changes associated with a nutritional intervention.<sup>12</sup>

## **Skin – Clinical Evidence for VERISOL and Other Collagen Peptides**

VERISOL is Gelita's branded collagen peptide formulation for skin. Its peptide profile aims to support dermal fibroblasts.

- **VERISOL-specific evidence supports skin benefits at the standard dose** – In a 2025 trial of 66 women, VERISOL at 2.5 grams per day for eight weeks was associated with improvements in skin hydration, elasticity, and wrinkle reduction.<sup>13</sup>
- **Other collagen peptide formulations have shown similar skin effects** – Another 2025 randomized trial of 77 women tested a different bioactive collagen peptide product, at 5 grams per day for 12 weeks. That study also found significant improvements in dermal density, hydration, and transepidermal water loss, with benefits that persisted for four weeks after supplementation ended.<sup>14</sup>
- **Comparable findings have appeared with other non-VERISOL collagen sources as well** – A 2024 trial that used tuna-derived collagen peptides also reported improvements in skin hydration, elasticity, and dermal density at eight weeks, with substantial retention of benefit after discontinuation.<sup>15</sup>
- **The persistence of benefit after discontinuation may have mechanistic significance** – When improvements remain after supplementation stops, the effect may reflect more than a short-lived cosmetic change. The pattern suggests structural changes within the dermal extracellular matrix, likely through fibroblast stimulation and new collagen deposition.

## **Bone – FORTIBONE and the Osteoblast-Osteoclast Balance**

FORTIBONE targets bone health. In a 12-month randomized, placebo-controlled trial involving postmenopausal women with reduced bone mass, 5 grams of FORTIBONE per day was associated with improvements in bone mineral density at the spine and femoral neck. The proposed mechanism may involve stimulation of osteoblasts and reduction of osteoclast activity, potentially shifting the balance toward bone formation.<sup>16</sup>

- **Clinical trials show significant improvements in bone density** – A 2025 meta-analysis pooling data across multiple bone health trials found that collagen peptide supplementation was associated with improvements in bone mineral density at

both the femoral neck and spine, with enhanced effects when combined with vitamin D and calcium.<sup>17</sup>

- **Specific markers provide insight into bone formation and breakdown –** Improvements in bone turnover markers – increased P1NP (bone formation marker) and decreased CTX (bone resorption marker) – suggest that collagen peptides may influence the balance of bone remodeling beyond simply providing mineral supplementation.

## **Nitta Gelatin's Four-Fold Potency Advantage**

On the Japanese side, Nitta Gelatin's Wellnex Replenwell product line represents the current state of the art. Using proprietary enzymatic processes, Replenwell ingredients contain up to 30 times the concentration of bioactive dipeptides compared to standard collagen peptides.

- **This higher concentration means effective doses can be achieved with smaller servings –** Skin benefits may occur with as little as 2.5 grams per day. Nitta has received dual "Food with Function Claims" for both skin moisture and skin elasticity through Japan's stringent regulatory process.
- **Direct comparisons have been made between concentrated and conventional formulations –** The 2024 multicenter five-arm trial, conducted by researchers affiliated with Nitta Gelatin, represents one of the more rigorous head-to-head comparisons in this area.<sup>18</sup> One hundred subjects with knee osteoarthritis received either 2.5, 5, or 10 grams of Nitta's Type J concentrated collagen peptides, 10 grams of conventional collagen peptides, or a placebo for 90 days.

The Type J 2.5-gram group matched the conventional 10-gram group across Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index (WOMAC) scores, quality of life measures, serum CTX-II levels (a biomarker of cartilage breakdown), and MRI-based cartilage assessment.

At the same time, the Type J 10-gram group showed the greatest improvements across all measures. This dose-efficiency advantage has practical implications for consumer compliance and cost.

## **The Sports Medicine Meta-Analysis**

The 2024 Sports Medicine systematic review and meta-analysis provides a comprehensive evidence summary for musculoskeletal benefits.<sup>19</sup> Across 19 randomized controlled trials and 768 participants, collagen peptide supplementation combined with physical training was associated with improvements in multiple measures of muscle and connective tissue health.

- **Effects were quantified across several performance and structural outcomes** – In fat-free mass, the standardized mean difference (SMD), a statistical measure of how large the improvement was relative to the comparison group, was 0.48.

Tendon morphology (SMD 0.67), muscle architecture (SMD 0.39), maximal strength (SMD 0.19), and 48-hour recovery in reactive strength following exercise-induced muscle damage (SMD 0.43) all showed similar measurable benefits.

- **Tendon-related changes stand out given their biological characteristics** – The tendon morphology finding is particularly important because tendons are among the body's most collagen-dense tissues and among the slowest to remodel, suggesting that these peptides may reach and influence even slow-remodeling target tissues.

## **What You Can Actually Buy**

Now, the practical question is what can you actually buy? The bioactive collagen peptide ingredients from Gelita and Nitta are sold primarily business-to-business (B2B) to supplement companies that incorporate them into finished products.

- **Some consumer products do include these targeted formulations** – Consumer products containing these targeted formulations are available from several supplement brands, typically ranging from \$30 to \$60 per container for 25 to 30 servings.
- **Direct-to-consumer options exist but differ in specificity** – Gelita also sells a basic collagen hydrolysate powder directly to consumers, available online at approximately \$40 per pound.

This is a general collagen hydrolysate, not one of their target-specific bioactive formulations, so it contains a broader peptide profile. But it will provide a meaningful quantity of collagen-derived di- and tripeptides, including Pro-Hyp and Hyp-Gly. At a commonly studied intake of 10 grams per day, one container lasts about 45 days – roughly \$27 per month.

The Nitta Gelatin Wellnex products are primarily available in Asia and through B2B channels. Direct consumer access in the United States is limited, though some specialty retailers carry products formulated with Wellnex ingredients.

## **The Future of Collagen Science**

The future of this field is moving away from the crude "eat collagen, build collagen" model toward a precision approach – specific peptides, targeting specific tissues, at specific doses, backed by specific clinical trials. The research base is growing. The challenge is making it accessible and affordable.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Bioactive Collagen Peptides**

**Q: How are bioactive collagen peptides different from regular collagen?**

**A:** Regular collagen is mostly broken down into individual amino acids during digestion. Bioactive collagen peptides, on the other hand, include small fragments that appear to resist digestion and enter your bloodstream intact, where research suggests they may influence how your cells produce and organize collagen.

**Q: How do these peptides survive digestion when most proteins don't?**

**A:** Certain amino acids in collagen, especially proline and hydroxyproline, create a structure that makes the peptide bonds harder for digestive enzymes to break. This allows specific dipeptides to pass through your digestive system intact.

**Q: What happens after these peptides enter my bloodstream?**

**A:** Once absorbed, these peptides travel to tissues like your skin and cartilage, where they interact with cells and trigger processes that increase collagen production and support tissue structure.

**Q: Why are some advanced collagen products harder to find?**

**A:** Many of the most specialized collagen peptides are sold to manufacturers rather than directly to consumers. This limits availability and makes it harder for you to identify which products contain these specific formulations.

**Q: Is regular collagen still useful if it doesn't contain these targeted peptides?**

**A:** Yes. Standard collagen can still provide amino acids your body can use, but it lacks the targeted signaling effects of specific peptides, which may make its impact less direct or require higher intake.

*These findings are from research conducted in clinical settings. Results may not apply to all individuals.*

*This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult a qualified healthcare provider before making changes to your health regimen.*

## Sources and References

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