Does the Weather Really Impact Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms?

by BRENDA VANTA

Rheumatoid Arthritis and Weather

Many people with arthritis swear they can predict what the weather will do the next day, as their pain worsens before rain or a cold spell. Let's look at the evidence and what you can do to keep your joints mobile and pain free, despite the weather.

Research

A review of a few studies conducted by health experts from Johns Hopkins suggests that there is some connection between rheumatoid arthritis and weather changes. For example, one study (conducted in a warm climate, Argentina) evaluated the link between weather and arthritis pain in 151 people diagnosed with RA, OA and fibromyalgia, and compared the results with a group of people without arthritis.

The participants in the study kept a journal for one year to see if the weather does influence the symptoms. Those in the arthritis group revealed more pain on those days when the temperature was cooler, while the healthy people were not affected by weather. Furthermore, the patients with RA were also affected by high humidity and high pressure, however the authors noted that this correlation was not significant enough to allow pain to predict weather changes.

Other studies suggest that people who live in warm, drier weather tend to have fewer episodes of arthritic pain. However, it appears that the climate does not affect the progression of the RA, just the symptoms, like pain.

Medical expert James Fant, MD, director of rheumatology at the School of Medicine's University Specialty Clinics, believes that there is a connection between weather and joint pain and has some explanations.

Barometric pressure can have an impact on your joints, he says. An inflamed joint will swell even more if the barometric pressure is decreased, because there is less atmospheric pressure holding the joint tissues back. The nerves surrounding the joints will be stimulated by the swollen tissue and will trigger the sensation of pain.

Cold weather has the opposite effect to barometric pressure, shrinking the tissue and pulling the nerves. Again, the nerves will get irritated, causing pain. During cold weather people also exercise less and may feel low and depressed, factors which can cause symptom aggravation (especially joint pain and stiffness).

So is relocating to a warm, dry place is the solution for your joints? Not necessarily – consider the following tips to avoid arthritic pain in the cold or rainy days.

Tips to Prevent Arthritic Pain

1. **Adopt a healthy lifestyle.** A diet based on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meat and fish, nuts and seeds provide micro and macro-nutrients, and plenty of antioxidants that can help control the

inflammation in your joints (and the entire body). On the other hand, highly processed foods promote inflammation.

2. **Take vitamin D.** Vitamin D is made in your skin when exposed to sun. Vitamin D deficiency (more evident in the winter) has been linked with more pain and disease activity in RA patients. Overall vitamin D deficiency is more prevalent in patients with RA and other autoimmune diseases. Researchers suggest that vitamin D supplementation is beneficial for pain relief associated with RA.
3. **Stay active.** Aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes most days. Exercise will keep your joints mobile and flexible, strengthen the muscles and help release feel good chemicals in the body (which also have pain killer qualities).