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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Can You “Feel” Weather Changes?

Can you feel weather changes? Does your body tell you when it will rain? Do you anticipate weather changes before they arrive? Do you sometimes feel that you are a human barometer? If so, join the club. Many people feel the ache in their bones up to two days before a storm system moves into our area. They are the arthritis sufferers, and they have a better forecasting track record than many meteorologists do.

Health care professionals are not in total agreement on this "human barometer" theory, but people with arthritis have no quarrels. Their bodies seem to talk to them about the weather, with inflamed joints crying out in pain. There is no clinical proof of a weather-body connection, but the daily experience of millions of people says otherwise. The old saying, "Absence of proof is not proof of absence" seems to hold true.

There are theories in the medical literature dating back to the mid-1850s, but no proof. In 1961, Dr. J. Hollander, a famous arthritis specialist, built a climate chamber that allowed him to change several atmospheric variables. He put patients in the chamber and varied the conditions, asking the patients to rate their joint pain. He found that high humidity combined with low barometric pressure resulted in increased joint pain and stiffness. Neither weather variable caused pain by itself, but when combined, they caused problems. Hollander felt that inflamed joints swell as the barometric pressure dropped, causing irritation to the nerves around the joints.

Barometric pressure is simply the weight of the atmosphere pushing down on us. The atmosphere is made up of molecules, mainly nitrogen and oxygen, but other constituents as well. These molecules have weight. A barometer is the instrument used to measure this weight. Barometric pressure is usually given on the weather reports in inches of mercury, e.g. 29.97 inches of mercury. The barometric pressure falls when a low-pressure system approaches, which typically results in clouds and rain. Barometric pressure rises when a high-pressure system approaches, usually bringing clearing skies and dry weather.

Arthritis patients tend to report pain and stiffness in inflamed joints when the pressure changes, especially the rapid rise or fall of the barometer. These are the times when storm systems approach or move away from our area. But each person is different. Somebody may report pain a full week prior to a big storm, while another person may get a body response less than 24 hours before the rain.

Some people believe moving to a dry, quiet weather climate like Arizona and New Mexico will help their arthritis pain. But storm systems pass over those areas as well. The incidence of strong swings in barometric pressure is less in the desert, but they still occur. And humidity levels fluctuate, too. It's not always a "dry heat" in Arizona. The monsoon season during the summer months feature hot, humid weather. It is difficult to find the perfect weather location for reducing joint pain.

Even though we don't consciously feel the weight of the air on our skin pushing down with an average strength of 14 pounds per square inch, the fluctuations in that weight make some of us scream out in pain. Isn't it ironic that despite the major advances in technology for weather forecasting, the human body may still be the best indicator of weather changes?

The best cure for increased arthritic pain during swings in barometric pressure is to prevent the arthritis from occurring in the first place. This is where exercise and regular chiropractic care come in. A chiropractor can help you restore and maintain the full mobility or range of motion in your joints. When you combine this with regular exercise, your joints will remain healthy and not experience progressive arthritic changes.