

The weather's not to blame for your aches and pains

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New research from The George Institute for Global Health has revealed the weather plays no part in the symptoms associated with either back pain or osteoarthritis.



It's long been thought episodes of both back <u>pain</u> and arthritis can be triggered by changes in the <u>weather</u>, including temperature, humidity, <u>air</u> <u>pressure</u>, <u>wind direction</u> and precipitation.

Professor Chris Maher, of The George Institute for Global Health, said: "The belief that pain and inclement weather are linked dates back to Roman times. But our research suggests this belief may be based on the fact that people recall events that confirm their pre-existing views.

"Human beings are very susceptible so it's easy to see why we might only take note of pain on the days when it's cold and rainy outside, but discount the days when they have symptoms but the weather is mild and sunny."

Almost 1000 people with lower back pain, and around 350 with <u>knee</u> <u>osteoarthritis</u> were recruited for the Australian-based studies. Weather data from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology were sourced for the duration of the study period. Researchers compared the weather at the time patients first noticed pain with weather conditions one week and one month before the onset of pain as a control measure.

Results showed no association between back pain and temperature, humidity, air pressure, wind direction or precipitation. However, higher temperatures did slightly increase the chances of lower back pain, but the amount of the increase was not clinically important.

The findings reinforce earlier research on back pain and inclement weather from The George Institute which received widespread criticism from the public on social media.

Professor Maher, who led the back pain study, added: "People were adamant that adverse weather conditions worsened their symptoms so we decided to go ahead with a new study based on data from new patients



with both <u>lower back pain</u> and osteoarthritis. The results though were almost exactly the same - there is absolutely no link between pain and the weather in these conditions."

Back pain affects up to a third of the world's population at any one time, (1) whilst almost 10 per cent of men and 18 percent of women over the age of 60 have osteoarthritis (2).

Associate Professor Manuela Ferreira, who led the osteoarthritis research at The George Institute, said: "People who suffer from either of these conditions should not focus on the weather as it does not have an important influence on your symptoms and it is outside your control."

A/Prof Ferreira, Senior Research Fellow at The George Institute and at the Institute of Bone and Joint Research, added: "What's more important is to focus on things you can control in regards to managing pain and prevention."

The studies were carried out across Australia with average daily temperatures ranging from 5.4C to 32.8C.

More information: Keira Beilken et al, Acute Low Back Pain? Do Not Blame the Weather—A Case-Crossover Study, *Pain Medicine* (2016). <u>DOI: 10.1093/pm/pnw126</u>

Provided by George Institute for Global Health

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