

Weather and arthritis: Is there really a connection?

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It's long been conventional wisdom that weather makes arthritis pain

worse.

The issue has been studied through the years, with conflicting findings. But three recent studies found [weather](#) does have some impact, said Dr. Robert Shmerling, writing for the [Harvard Health Blog](#).

In one study with 222 participants who had [arthritis of the hip](#), researchers from The Netherlands found that patients reported slightly worse pain and stiffness as [barometric pressure](#) and humidity rose, but the weather effect was small.

Another study looked at weather-related symptoms among 800 European adults with [arthritis](#) of the hip, knee or hands. They reported increasing pain and stiffness with higher humidity, especially in [cold weather](#). In general, changes in weather didn't affect their symptoms, though.

Participants of a third study reported their chronic pain symptoms. Most of the 2,600 individuals had some type of arthritis. This study found "modest relationships" between [pain](#) and higher humidity, lower atmospheric pressure and higher wind speed.

Past studies have looked at the impact of rain, humidity and rising or falling barometric pressure. Humidity, temperature, precipitation and [barometric pressure](#) may all be involved, Shmerling said.

"Having reviewed the studies, I find myself not knowing how to answer my patients who ask me why their symptoms reliably worsen when the weather is damp or rain is coming, or when some other weather event happens," Shmerling said in a Harvard Health news release. "I usually tell them that, first, I believe there is a connection between weather and joint symptoms, and second, researchers have been unable to figure out just what matters most about the weather and arthritis symptoms or why there should be a connection."

Whether it's helpful to know the impact of weather is also not clear. The new studies will probably not have an impact on individual arthritis sufferers until weather or internal environments can be precisely controlled.

Still, identifying a link may help with understanding the causes and mechanisms of arthritis symptoms, which could lead to better treatments or preventive strategies, Shmerling said.

"In addition, figuring out why some people seem to feel worse in certain circumstances while others notice no change [or even feel better] in those same environments could help us understand subtle differences between types of arthritis or the ways individuals respond to them," he said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [arthritis](#).

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