Can Joint Pain Predict the Weather?
By: Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

The belief that changes in the weather can affect joint pain has been around for centuries.

Perhaps you had a grandmother who would assure you rain was coming because her arthritic knee was acting up.

Or maybe you have earned a reputation as the family weatherperson because your joints become stiff and achy right before a snowstorm blows in.

It’s common to blame joint pain flare-ups on changes in the weather, but does science really back up this belief?

It’s difficult to study the effect of weather on pain because you cannot control for weather in the same way you can control other variables in a study. Additionally, there is never just a single weather condition present at a time, so it can be challenging when trying to determine exactly what weather condition may be inducing pain. While there isn’t much in the way of controlled scientific studies, there are some theories that shed light on what might be happening to our bodies when there is a change in the weather.

Some people experience headaches when the weather is about to change. Scientists say this may have to do with barometric pressure changes, which create a sensitivity in joint fluids. When the pressure changes in our environment, our muscles, tendons, ligaments and tissues can expand or contract, causing pain. When the barometric pressure is low, joint fluids can receive less pressure, causing an increase in swelling and inflammation. Barometric pressure often drops before a storm, which may be why so many people think their joint pain or headaches can predict the weather.

For some people, colder temperatures are synonymous with joint pain. Researchers hypothesize that as temperatures drop, joint fluids have more viscosity. As a result, tissues become thicker and less moveable, making joints feel less flexible and stiffer than usual. Sudden dropping temperatures could have your joints feel more slow-moving or take longer to “warm up” for activity.

Researchers have also theorized that in colder weather the body tries to conserve heat by protecting the most critical organs, supplying them with the most blood flow. The body then limits blood flow to areas of the body that do not need as much protection – your extremities, hands, feet and knees – causing stiffness and pain.

While there may not be a hard and fast scientific correlation between weather and joint pain, the fact remains that people experience flare-ups in all kinds of weather. Here are a few simple ways you can find relief whether it is hot and dry or cold and wet.

**Stay active**Motion is lotion for your joints, so keep moving -- even when it might be raining or too hot outside. Activity prevents joint and muscle stiffness, promotes blood flow and ensures proper lymph drainage. Search up some quick at home yoga or stretching videos online or take advantage of an indoor pool for some low-impact aerobic exercise. On a recent rainy day trip to the Home Depot, I ran into a man walking his dog around the outer aisles of the store. He had calculated how many laps he had to do to get a mile in. That man knew how important it was to go on a walk and was committed to getting the necessary steps for him (and his fur baby) to stay active and feel optimal!

**Keep warm**Keeping your body warm promotes blood flow, which creates more viscosity in your joints and tissues. When heading out into cooler weather, make sure to use a vest to keep your core warm, and also socks and gloves for the extremities. Consider taking a warm bath using Epsom salts, drinking warm tea or simply putting a heating pad on problematic arthritic joints during cold weather.

**Follow anti-inflammatory diet**What you put into your body has a huge impact on how your body feels. To minimize or avoid weather-induced joint pain, monitor what you eat. Try eliminating processed foods and lean more towards fresh whole foods like fruits, vegetables and healthy fats like fish and olive oil. For a full list of foods to fight inflammation, feel free to email me at pathwaysth@gmail.com and I will share the information with you.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. In addition, the practice is committed to being a valuable source of information so that people can learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent future illness. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*