How Fibromyalgia is Affected by Weather Changes – And What You Can Do

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The Connection Between Fibromyalgia and Weather

It is not uncommon to hear someone with arthritis claiming their knee or hip can predict the weather better than a meteorologist. They always know in advance when a cold front or a rainstorm are moving in, with an almost scary accuracy.

What about those of us with fibromyalgia? Many with one type of rheumatic condition or another, including fibromyalgia, have made claims that the changes of weather will affect their pain levels, fatigue levels, or other various symptoms.

Researchers have found little scientific proof to back up the claim that fibromyalgia symptoms are affected by the weather and weather changes. A study done in 2013 claims that they could not find a correlation between fibromyalgia flare-ups or increased pain and weather changes.

I cannot speak for the researchers or the people they tested, all I can do is talk about my personal experience with fibromyalgia and the weather.

How I'm Affected by Seasonal Changes

I have lived through many season changes while living with fibromyalgia. I have seen a clear pattern emerge in how I feel in connection to the weather.

Spring comes, and I feel a bit better, except of course if it’s a particularly rainy spring. In that case, I spend days feeling achy deep down to my bones and have a soreness that radiates all throughout my body.

Next Summer comes, and with it, the intense heat and overwhelming humidity Southeast Texas is famous for. The heat and humidity leave me completely and utterly drained. My fatigue skyrockets during the Summer months.

Then Autumn arrives, once the temperature drops some I start to feel a little better until the weather begins flipping from hot to cold like a light switch. At that point, my body goes into some shock as if it cannot adjust to the constant changes.

Eventually, the cool weather settles in for the Winter. Thankfully it doesn’t get very cold where I am because the cold causes an indescribable pain. It is like being stabbed all over by icicles, it is like my veins are frozen throughout my body, and they may shatter at any moment.

Now, this is all just referring to season changes, this doesn’t even begin to cover the flare-ups I frequently have in the days before a thunderstorm.

Fibromyalgia and Temperature Sensitivity

Another major issue those of us with fibromyalgia face is temperature sensitivity, the inability to regulate our body temperature.

The average person goes outside; they feel hot or cold depending on the weather, then they go back inside. A blast of AC or a cozy heater brings them back to a comfortable temperature fairly quickly.

This is not always the case if you have fibromyalgia.

Why are Researchers Saying the Weather Does Not Affect Fibromyalgia?

I know I am not alone in experiencing a shift in symptoms based on the weather or temperature changes. So why are some claiming fibromyalgia is not adversely affected by the weather? There are many factors to consider.

Unfortunately, much continues to be misunderstood about fibromyalgia. This is a complex illness that affects each individual differently. There is also the possibility that the symptoms we feel when the weather changes could be caused by one or more of the many companion illnesses that frequently accompany fibromyalgia.

Regardless of what the true cause is, we need to know how to handle these fluctuating symptoms that we face as each new season approaches.

How to Best Minimize Negative Effects from the Changing Seasons

The most obvious suggestion is to find a location where the weather is mild year-round and move there. Or possibly break up the year, live in one spot for the Spring and Summer, and live somewhere else for the Autumn and Winter.

However, that is not a practical solution for many of us.

I'm going to share with you my top tips on how you can manage the heat during the hot summer months and how to deal with the cold weather during the frigid months of winter.

How to Deal with the Heat

- Stay indoors using an air conditioner or fans when possible. But be cautious not to lower the temperature too much in your home, that will make it that much more of a shock to your system when you do go outside.
- Plan outside activities for the morning or evening.
- Drink lots of water, make sure to carry a water bottle when going out.
- Drink less caffeine and alcohol, as these are dehydrating beverages.
- Eat light meals and use the oven and stove as little as possible.
- Taking vitamin C daily can help your body better adjust to the heat.
- Take cool showers.
- Wear lightweight, breathable clothing, such as cotton, when going out.
- If you do get overheated, apply a cool, wet cloth or ice pack to your wrists or neck. These are pulse points and will help your body cool down faster.

How to Survive in the Cold

- Use your home's heater, or keep small space heaters in the rooms you use most.
- Plan outside activities for the middle of the day, when it is warmest.
- Wear warm clothes, preferably layers, when going out. And don’t forget your hat, as most of your body heat escapes through the head.

- Keep your feet warm, wear socks and water-resistant shoes.
- Keep moving, as difficult as exercise can be for us, movement helps the body get and stay warm. Try gentle, low impact exercises.
- Wiggle your fingers and toes a lot when you are out. Like with exercise, the movement helps to keep warm.
- Take warm, not hot, showers. As tempting as it may be to take a long hot shower, it will be a shock to your system when you get out.
- Eating healthy fats, soups, spicy food, and drinking hot coffee or tea will help to keep your body temperature warm.
- Use a heating pad, hot water bottle, or heating blanket to warm up.

In Conclusion...

We may not have scientific proof as to why we feel differently when the weather changes, but we know our own body and know that it does affect us. The best thing we can do right now is learning to cope with these changes the best we can.

As the winter months approach for most of us let's get ourselves prepared to stay as warm as we can!