

Weather may influence arthritis

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New York - Cool temperatures, humidity and high atmospheric pressure may be associated with spontaneous pain among individuals with arthritis or fibromyalgia, new study findings show.

"These results support the belief that weather influences rheumatic pain, albeit in different ways, depending on the (underlying disease) and (the patient's) weather sensitivity," report Dr Ingrid Strusberg of the Centro Reumatologico Strusberg in Cordoba City, Argentina, and her colleagues. Strusberg's team analysed questionnaire responses from 151 individuals with fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis. Fibromyalgia is a condition marked by pain in the muscles and around the joints and is often accompanied by depression and fatigue.

Its cause is unknown. Osteoarthritis refers to joint inflammation and pain that most commonly occurs among older adults. Rheumatoid arthritis also features inflammation and pain, but the symptoms arise from an abnormal immune system assault on the body's joints.

In the study, participants reported on their pain symptoms and causes over one year. For comparison, the researchers also looked at 32 healthy individuals. These reports were correlated with meteorological data for the Cordoba area.

The researchers found that for participants with all three conditions, pain was significantly associated with low temperature. In addition, pain was related to high humidity and high atmospheric pressure among rheumatoid arthritis patients, and high humidity among osteoarthritis patients, according to findings published in the February issue of the Journal of Rheumatology.

For those with fibromyalgia, pain was associated with low temperature and high atmospheric pressure. No correlation between weather and pain was found among individuals in the comparison group, the authors note.

According to Strusberg's team, the idea that weather affects joint pain is an "ancient belief" that still persists. But experts question whether this effect is a true physiological phenomenon or just a "false notion" of a relationship where there is none.

"Our study," they write, "supports the possibility that meteorological factors can have some effect on spontaneous pain in rheumatic patients."
