

The association of changes in weather with illness has been recognised since Roman times. Folklore abounds with traditional sayings such as "aches and pains, coming rains" and our language is full of expressions such as 'feeling under the weather'.

The tennis star Monica Seles, who was stabbed in the back during a tennis tournament, said in an interview in 1995, that her scar tingled when rain was coming.

A variety of aspects of weather change have been postulated as contributing to changes in pain: temperature, barometric pressure, rainfall, humidity, thunderstorms, sunshine, increased ionisation of the air.

I remember a GP friend of mine who told me that people in the desert get arthritis, so perhaps humidity is not the culprit.

I find that a drop in temperature heralds a certain type of leg pain unlike any other I experience; I have had this since my teens.

Autumn is quite a difficult season for me because winds seem to make me worse. In summer, a relatively chilly night will cause me to be woken by severe pain in my elbows.

In 1929, the prestigious Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) published a report that suggested that warm weather is beneficial and barometric pressure changes detrimental to patients with arthritis.

Much more recent studies have concluded that cold weather and barometric pressure changes cause increased pain in patients with arthritis.

The following pain diagnoses have been reported as particularly sensitive to weather changes:

- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Osteoarthritis
- Fibromyalgia:
- Phantom limb pain*
- Headaches
- Scar pain
- Trigeminal neuralgia*

(*neurological pain similar to arachnoiditis pain)

A study in the 1980s found that arthritis patients experienced malaise, inactivity, depression and psychological discomfort in cold rainy periods and that this correlated well with changes in relevant substances in the body.

There has also been a study that found that temperature drop and increased humidity correlated with hospital admissions for patients with lumbar disc prolapses.

An estimated 90% of fibromyalgia patients believe that cold and wet weather has a negative impact on pain.

Possible mechanisms include: tendons, muscles, bones and scar tissue are of various densities and are affected by temperature and degree of humidity, which impacts on their expansion or contraction.

Sites of microtrauma could be sensitive to expansions and contractions due to changes in atmospheric pressure; changes in barometric pressure may increase stiffness in joints, which might be a particular problem in inflamed joints which are highly sensitised.

Change in barometric pressure might even cause a transient 'disequilibrium' in body pressure and sensitise nerve endings, which could explain pain increasing just before weather changes.

There is, of course, little concrete scientific evidence, but a large body of 'circumstantial' evidence and hearsay; enough to convince me, and if I were to be sceptical, my body would soon convince me otherwise!!

One final point: it seems that moving to warmer climes isn't necessarily the best solution, as it appears that we acclimatise fairly swiftly and still end up like a barometer!

Also, many arachniacs, like myself, are heat intolerant (I used to be a real sun worshipper, but have stayed well out of it all summer)

Below I will attempt to outline some of the possible problems that may be relevant.

An article of this nature cannot explore these avenues in depth, but I hope that the information may be somewhat reassuring and also helpful in managing the daily problems we face due to arachnoiditis.