# Managing Fibromyalgia Flareups by Staying Cool

by MARIANNE BROWN

## Fibromyalgia and Heat

Fibromyalgia causes many symptoms, ranging from pain to tenderness, fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, mental health issues, and sensitivities to the environment. This can include some foods and medicines. What is not talked about enough, in my opinion, are the environmental factors such as the weather. According to an old study carried out in 1981, many fibromyalgia patients are sensitive to weather conditions. Are there any connections between fibromyalgia and heat? Let's take a look.

### Weather and Fibromyalgia Patients

When I first started to notice symptoms, I found autumn and winter to be very painful. Those seasons brought increased pain and blue, numb fingers. Now, I love these seasons and it is the summer that I find the most challenging.

Even when the weather is not classed as too hot, I find my symptoms flare-up. When the temperature increases, I literally cannot go out or function properly and tend to hide indoors surrounded by fans.

According to Verywell Health, a large internet survey of nearly 2,600 people with fibromyalgia helped shed some light on this relationship. A whopping 80% of respondents said "weather changes" were what triggered their fibromyalgia symptoms. The weather was the second-most reported worsening factor, coming in after emotional stress (83%). Other triggers are sleeping issues (79%), overactivity (70%) and mental health stress (68%).

### What Could Happen in Hot Weather?

In hot weather there is a multitude of uncomfortable symptoms, ranging from unsettling to the extreme:

- Struggling to cool down
- Excessive sweating
- Fatigue
- Dehydration
- Sleeplessness
- Allodynia (a type of pain that comes from something that would not normally be painful)
- Headaches
- Migraines
- Dizziness
- Anxiety

### Why Temperature Affects Fibromyalgia

According to research into fibromyalgia, the nervous system is over sensitized. This same system is affected by

homeostasis. This occurs when your internal systems work hard to keep you stable and regulated. You might notice that when you get hot, your blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, and internal body temperature change. Add in fibromyalgia and all these functions can be exaggerated.

### Weather Factors Affecting Fibromyalgia

There are different factors within weather systems that can affect symptoms:

- **Humidity**: High and low humidity can cause headaches, dizziness and widespread muscle pain.
- **Pressure**: Changes in barometric pressure can trigger muscular pain.
- **Precipitation**: Even in summer, we tend to get an increased risk of thunderstorms and this can worsen pain.
- **Temperature**: I find that sudden highs in temperature aggravate my symptoms, especially headaches, dizziness, panic and fatigue.

### What Is the Best Weather for Fibromyalgia Patients?

A study done in Cardoba, Argentina in 2002 evaluated the effects of symptoms in the changing weather conditions for an entire year. It was concluded that pain increases when the temperature falls, and atmospheric pressure increases.

A study done in Norway concluded that symptoms were worse from December to January, and April to May. Personally, I find that the summer months are the worst for my symptoms. I find it easier to keep warm than to keep cool.

Many studies find that a warm, dry climate is better suited for fibromyalgia patients, rather than cold, low-pressure environments. Dry climate areas include states such as Arizona, New Mexico, and California, as these areas tend to have a similar climate throughout the entire year.

This experience is different for all of us. Where you live could have an impact on your symptoms. There may be places that you would like to retire to in order to help control your symptoms. Learning coping strategies that help you and your symptoms is key.

### Warm Weather Coping Strategies

Let us take a look at what you can do during hot, humid weather.

#### Stay Cool

There are many tools that can help you combat summer heat:

- Dehumidifiers
- Fans
- Air conditioning when indoors
- Cool baths and showers
- Wearing a visor instead of a hat
- Avoiding hair-styling products that use heat
- Carrying a cooler with ice, ice packs and cold drinks
- Running cold water over your hands and/or splashing it on your face

#### Stay Hydrated

Sticking to cold foods is essential, as well as intaking plenty of liquids, especially water. Make sure the substances are not too cold, as this can cause cramping. Limiting alcohol is also important as alcohol can cause your body to lose body fluids.

**Stay Comfortable**

Wear loose-fitting clothes made of breathable fabrics. Make sure you wear bright or light colors, as dark colors absorb heat. Wearing sandals or slip-on shoes that do not require socks can also help keep you cool.

**My Experience**

As mentioned above, a fibromyalgia patient struggles with body temperature adjustment. All extreme weather, including summer, can worsen the condition. It can cause severe pain and discomfort for the patient. I tend to avoid sun exposure, but as we discussed above, by taking a few precautionary measures you can protect yourself.

When you first develop fibromyalgia, you may find it difficult to manage. It will become easier to control your symptoms over the summer when you understand it better and try out some of the strategies outlined above with proper planning.

**Look for Support**

There is a wealth of further advice and reading online. This can includes reaching out to support groups. Remember, even though fibromyalgia delivers similar symptoms, we are all different people, and trial and error will reduce your symptoms, allowing you to enjoy summer outdoors with your family and friends.