

PRINT-Weather changes can be a pain, literally, for migraine sufferers

Weather changes can play a major role in triggering migraine headaches for some people, according to specialists who treat the condition. In fact, for some people, weather can play a huge role in migraine headaches.

Ashley Workman is an advanced practice registered nurse with OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute (OSF INI). She works in the headache and cranial facial pain program and explains, "Specific weather changes that we see influence some of our patients' migraine patterns are changes in barometric pressure, which we identify as any fluctuation or drop in the atmospheric pressure around us in our environment, extreme temperature shifts — so not only extreme heat waves, but also those cold snaps, or any more extreme shift in temperature from high to low."

Workman says Illinois weather has offered recent examples of those quick changes when it was 90 degrees just a few weeks ago, but now it's dropping into the 30s and most people have turned their heat on. While scientists understand parts of the migraine process, Workman stresses the relationship between weather and migraine isn't fully understood.

Migraines are a complex disorder, and there are some theories out there that weather changes influence migraines. Workman points out that researchers have one theory in particular that is centered around the influence of barometric pressure.

"Does that shift in atmospheric pressure actually have an influence on the pressure within our skull? And that can then further influence how our blood vessels constrict and dilate. And those specific changes then can trigger those neurons and nerves signaling the pain process, which then leads to inflammation and causing that migraine headache for patients."

Testing those theories can be difficult because the brain and the nervous system are so complex.

"These neurons that we're talking about are so teensy, tiny and can be influenced by so many factors, migraine being one of those that the sky is somewhat the limit on what triggers them and it's very individualized to the person so that really adds a layer of complexity of giving someone sometimes a straightforward answer of why they have migraine or what their triggers are, because it can differ so much across the board," Workman suggests.

There is no cure for migraine headaches, so Workman says it truly is all about education and managing the condition by being prepared. Here are some approaches:

- Tracking headaches on a calendar can help identify weather-related patterns. She says that'll help better identify triggers.
- Having medication readily available is also key. Workman emphasizes the importance of always having your medication with you in case a migraine comes on, especially unexpectedly.
- Managing stress and routinely getting enough sleep are important.
- Focusing on a better diet and drinking more water to avoid dehydration is also a key to better management of migraine.

Ultimately, Workman advises that there are things providers can do to help patients live a little better lifestyle, knowing that they have migraine headaches including prescriptions, including acute medications or preventative medications.

She adds, "A lot has evolved in the migraine world over the last five to seven years, with newer treatments on the market that we haven't had that have been really, really so impactful for patients and leading to better migraine control."

If you have been struggling with migraine headaches, Workman says there's no need to suffer without support. Make an appointment with your [primary care provider](#).