



1025 N. Main, Layton, Utah 84041

544-4333

---

Clinic Hours: Monday-Thursday 9:00 am- 12:00 pm & 2:00 pm- 6:00 pm Friday 8:30 am- 12:00 pm

Friday 1:00 pm- 5:00 pm & Saturday 8:00 am-11:00am

Website: [healthandwellnesschiropractic.com](http://healthandwellnesschiropractic.com)

## Under the Weather?

Weather and human well-being are intimately linked, as the ravages of the tsunami in the Pacific and hurricane Katrina decisively demonstrated not long ago. Rain, drought, and snow have had drastic effects on history as well as human health. But what about the small-scale maladies: colds, headaches, aches, and pains? Does weather affect those? Many people think so.

It's hard to argue with what people feel in their bones. Yet science has found few solid connections.

**Heart attacks:** There may be a link between weather and heart attacks, at least in some people. As we reported previously, a large study in 1999 in northern France found that sudden drops in barometric pressure, as before a bad storm, might bring on heart attacks in people at high risk. More recently a study from Croatia found that a serious kind of heart arrhythmia (ventricular tachycardia) might be linked to a variety of weather conditions, including dropping barometric pressure.

Heart attacks and heart problems increase in winter, generally, all over the world. Yet the incidence varies from area to area—cold, wet weather seems to drive up the heart attack rate more noticeably in temperate climates than in colder places like Canada or Siberia. Furthermore, summer can also be a threat, notably for heart attack deaths. Several studies have found that hot weather is particularly a risk for poor people in U.S. cities, chiefly because they are less likely to have central air conditioning. Being over 65 and/or having diabetes, hypertension, or heart or lung disease also increases the risk of dying from temperature extremes or from shifts in barometric pressure. High temperatures tax the heart, which has to work harder

to keep the body cool; in cold weather, blood pressure is likely to be higher. All this works against the old, the unhealthy, and the poor, who are more likely to have inadequate housing.

**Colds and flu:** Viruses cause these ills, but it's tempting to blame winter weather. Experiment after experiment has shown that people catch cold only when exposed to viruses, not merely when they are chilled. Last year, however, researchers at Cardiff University in Wales found that people who had immersed their feet in icy water were almost three times more likely to catch cold than those with warm tootsies. Cries of "Grandma was right!" echoed around the world. Still, this was only a small, preliminary study. One of the researchers, Ronald Eccles, had proposed in an earlier study that acute chilling of the feet might make the nasal passages less resistant to viruses, at least in some people.

It makes sense to keep your feet warm and dry in cold weather, but if they get wet and icy, that does not mean you are doomed to start sneezing. You catch cold from sick people, not from the weather. Dry nasal passages resulting from dry winter air might make you more susceptible. The main reason cold weather and colds go together is probably that winter is school season. Children, who are immune to fewer cold viruses than adults, congregate in schools and daycare centers all winter and spread colds. Still, to many people (including Grandma) this has never seemed a sufficient explanation.

**Headaches:** People who get migraines often blame the weather, especially changes in weather, but most research has not borne this out. A study in *Headache* in 2004 reported that, in some people, weather variables do seem to trigger headaches, but that "more people thought weather was a trigger than was the case."

**The damp in your bones:** Most people with arthritis believe that joint pain comes on in cold, damp weather. In fact, many look on arthritis pain as a dependable barometer. But scientists have never been able to connect joint pain and weather—though not for lack of trying. An article in *Spine* in 2004 reviewed data from 23 centers in the U.S. involving 27,000 people. The only weather variable that appeared to influence physical pain was barometric pressure. However, its influence, researchers said, was minimal. A few years ago, researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston looked at

500 people with joint pain who lived in four different cities, varying from warm and dry to very cold and wet. All these people were convinced that cold, wet weather brought on pain. However, the incidence of chronic pain was the same in all four groups, regardless of climate or weather.

Arthritis pain gets better and then worse, and it's tempting to link these ups and downs to changing weather. But this is probably a mistake. If you want to move from a cold, wet climate to a sunny dry one, you might be happier, but it's never been shown that a sunny dry climate will help arthritis.

**Last words:** Weather is a powerful force. It can cause food shortages and heat stroke; it can encourage the breeding of mosquitoes and the multiplication of microbes; it can affect mood for better or worse; it can destroy cities or temporarily shut them down. It can kill. But so far as we can tell, it is not directly to blame for colds, headaches, joint pain, or even most heart attacks. Still, researchers will continue to investigate just what role it does play.