

Outdoor health tips from the Posse:

Winter weather and your arthritis

It has often been said that no good deed goes unpunished. I am living proof that the statement rings true, however, the punishment often comes later in life.

My body has been a poster child for physical abuse. I could never get into a quiet hobby, like stamp collecting, as adrenaline and going fast was all I ever wanted to do.

I played hockey and baseball in school, and some years thereafter. My real hobbies (besides hunting and fishing) were racing dirt bikes and later offshore powerboats. Going in excess of 100mph in 3 to 4 foot seas has an adverse reaction to one's spine, assuming that he or she wishes to stand up without supports later in life.

As an example, my left wrist was broken on 3 separate occasions. Two of the breaks occurred racing and the last one happened in a line of duty episode. These little injuries all heal, to a certain extent, and life gets back to normal.

The surprise happens about 20

years later when good old osteoarthritis sets in, sort of like a post humus award for your mind-boggling acts of idiocy earlier in life. This is when the real fun begins.

I was diagnosed with osteoarthritis in my wrists, knees and shoulders about a dozen years ago. Originally, I went the usual route prescribed by the doctors, which included anti-inflammatory drugs and steroids, and a few rounds of physical therapy, not seeing much relief.

Since then, I changed my lifestyle a bit by losing weight and adding serious exercise. Because of this, I rarely need any kind of medicine, unless I overdo an activity. First thing in the morning I still sound like a breakfast cereal, snap, crackle and pop, but once I move around a bit, things get better.

And then comes winter with all the snow and cold weather. There is a longstanding belief that weather affects arthritis pain. Some people believe they can predict the upcoming weather better than the TV meteorologist by the pain in their joints.

Maybe it is true and maybe it is not. Science, through many exhaustive studies, finds no connection between rainy weather and the symptoms of joint pain. One study indicates that arthritis patients visited doctors for relief more



often during dry times, instead of during rainy or snowy weather.

One of the problems with studies can be the missing of key information. When does the pain begin and how long before it gets bad enough for you to visit the doctor is the first question that is not in the study. It can take days or weeks for symptoms to get bad enough for you to seek help from the doctor.

Like everything science related, there are always conflicting studies. One study in 2014 asked 712 people with osteoarthritis through a survey about winter weather and how it influenced their pain. The results were 67 percent of the people studied said they were weather sensitive and experienced more joint pain with weather disturbances.

Some doctors believe that increased joint pain occurs more in the winter because of decreased activity and being less physically active than during the summer.

Perhaps science is not looking into the relationship of pain and the weather correctly. My theory is that rain or snow has nothing to do with it. I think it is barometric pressure and changes in weather or humidity that cause the onset of symptoms.

Changes in barometric pressure can cause expansion and contraction of tendons, muscles, bones and scar tissues, resulting in pain in the tissues that are affected by arthritis. Low temperatures during the winter months also increase the thickness of joint fluids, making them stiffer and perhaps more sensitive to pain during movement.

Whether you can predict the weather

by the pain in your joints or not, preventing the pain would be better. If it is cold outside, keep those hands warm with gloves or mittens. Long underwear will help keep the cold away from aching knee joints. The warmer you keep the joint while outdoors, the less pain you usually have to endure.

Hydration can be a problem in the winter months because you are not as thirsty as you are during the hot times. Even mild dehydration can make you more sensitive to pain so keep the water level up.

One of the things that really help my osteoarthritis is exercise. During the warm months, I get plenty of outdoor activity, but winter can be another story. We need to make an effort to stay physically active and exercise during the winter to help keep pain at bay. Treadmills, elliptical trainers, stationary bikes and weight sets are all examples of exercises you can do indoors.

Next is to take a look at your footwear. Especially with arthritis, you do not want to skimp on footwear. Purchase quality footwear with strong soles and a good fit. I would look for something with ankle support.

Consider a pair of quality insoles to

go with your footwear. Properly fitted insoles help distribute weight evenly along your foot, which helps to ease the stress to ankles, knees and hips.

I have no idea whether we can predict the weather by the pain in our joints or not. My Grandmother sure had an uncanny accuracy about the swelling in her fingers and upcoming rain. My Grandfather had a knee that ached for 2 days before it would snow.

My wrist hurts whenever we have a snowstorm. I don't know if it is because of the upcoming cold, barometric changes, or the fact that I have to go shovel the driveway. Science did not incorporate my laziness in their study.

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