

Why do weather changes give you headaches?

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Doctors don't yet fully understand why some brains are more sensitive to environmental changes. What we do know is that people with migraines have particularly sensitive nervous systems, and certain environmental changes—like air pressure, temperature, humidity, and air quality—can trigger pathways in the brain that lead to pain.

Weather changes can trigger migraines

Some common weather changes that trigger migraines include:

Change in atmospheric pressure

As a storm moves in, air pressure drops. Some scientists believe this change can affect the pressure inside your head or the way blood vessels in your brain expand and contract.

One theory is that changes in barometric pressure can cause a small imbalance in pressure between the inside of the skull and the outside environment. This can directly stimulate pain-sensitive nerves in the head, causing inflammation and triggering a migraine attack.

Others believe that inflammation, the way the brain processes sensory signals, and changes in serotonin levels all play a role in triggering migraines.

Extreme Temperature

Days that are too hot or too cold, or sudden changes in temperature, can throw off the body's internal balance. High humidity or sudden changes in humidity can also have a similar effect.

Air pollution

Air pollutants such as ozone and nitrogen dioxide can cause nerve inflammation, a contributing factor to migraines.

The sun is shining brightly

Sunlight can also be particularly irritating, possibly due to increased sensitivity to light and overactive visual processing systems in the brain.

Lightning and strong winds may also be associated with migraine attacks in some people.

In short, weather changes can stress an already sensitive brain. The exact triggers and responses vary from person to person, but research suggests that the interaction between weather and human biology plays a key role for a subset of migraine sufferers.



How to relieve migraines caused by weather

You can't change the weather, but you can take steps to reduce its impact. Here are some tips to help you cope with severe weather on your migraines:

Track your migraines and check the weather forecast: Use a diary or phone app to keep track of when your headaches occur, along with weather conditions. Patterns that may appear, such as pain the day before rain or during temperature changes, can help you adjust your schedule or medication plan.

Establish healthy eating, sleeping and exercise habits: Dehydration, poor sleep and skipping meals can exacerbate the effects of the elements, so keeping your body balanced will help reduce your risk of injury. Regular exercise and a healthy diet can also help.

Create a migraine-friendly environment: Stay indoors on sunny or humid days. Sunglasses, a sleep mask, or even blue-light-filtering glasses may help. Some people find that certain types of earplugs can reduce the pressure changes felt in the middle ear.



Try meditation, a mindfulness practice that helps people regulate physiological responses in the body, such as muscle response and breathing. These strategies can help the nervous system become less reactive over time, which is especially helpful when dealing with uncontrollable stimuli like the weather.

If the weather triggers frequent migraines, talk to your doctor about the best treatment options.

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