

New York Headache blog

by Dr. Alexander Mauskop

By: Dr. Mauskop
06-04-2012

Science of Migraine

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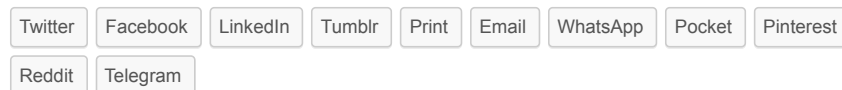
Weather and headaches

Weather is a common trigger of migraine headaches. Review of studies linking weather to migraines suggests that there are three weather-related triggers. It is high humidity, high temperature, and drop in barometric pressure. Some migraine sufferers, just like many people with arthritis, can predict rainy weather. We can speculate that the drop in barometric pressure causes blood vessels inside the skull to dilate and trigger a migraine. This happens because of faulty regulation of blood vessels in those with migraine. This is also probably the reason why migraines are sometimes caused by exercise or sexual activity – blood vessels dilate excessively and trigger a migraine. High altitude headache or mountain sickness is another example of headaches caused by low barometric pressure. In fact, one study showed that people living at high altitudes, specifically in Denver, are more likely to have migraines than those living at sea level. Treatment of barometric pressure headaches involves the usual approaches to migraines – regular exercise, biofeedback, magnesium, CoQ10, Botox, and drugs. Diamox (acetazolamide) is a diuretic drug that is particularly effective for mountain sickness and in some patients can also prevent weather-related headaches.

It is not clear why high humidity causes headaches, but high temperature may lead to a) dehydration, which is a trigger of migraines for many and b) again, dilatation of blood vessels which the body uses to cool itself by bringing more warm blood to the surface (this is why we look red in the heat).

There is an easy way to figure out if your headaches are triggered by weather – download our free app into your iPhone or iPad. Headache Relief Diary (also known as Migralex Diary) automatically downloads barometric pressure, humidity and temperature at the time of your headache. Just enter your zip code once and enter your headache information every time you get one and after a month or two you may be able to find your migraine triggers, including those related to the weather.

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Antonia says:07/01/2012
7:11 pm

I live in Vancouver, Canada. In recent years my headaches have accelerated first to a couple a week, and now to daily, with occasional breaks of three days or so. This past nine months have been pure misery. We have had virtually no sun and constant rain. I am quite sure this is a major contributor. I take Imitrex daily and Zomig nasal on a particularly bad day.

Laura says:04/11/2012
12:05 pm

Weather, unfortunately, is the one trigger I haven't been able to control. Food, sleep, even hormones can be controlled (by continually taking the Pill and daily beta blocker). But not weather. Also, I tend to get headache around 3 p.m. every day. Sometimes it blooms into a migraine, sometimes it doesn't. I know our building turns off the a.c. or heat that time of day.

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