

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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## “Is Weather-Related Pain Real ?

Is it true that weather-related pain can predict a change in the weather, when old injuries start “acting up?” The perceived relationship between changes in weather and pain has been recorded since the classical Roman age. In about 400 B.C., Hippocrates was the first to note that many illnesses were related to changes in season. The large body of folklore about how weather affects pain is reflected by traditional expressions, such as "aches and pain, coming rains," "feeling under the weather," and "ill health due to evil winds." According to Wikipedia, the first publication of documented changes in pain perception associated with the weather was in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* in 1887. This case report described a person with phantom limb pain who concluded that "approaching storms, dropping barometric pressure and rain were associated with increased pain complaint." Most investigations examining the relationship between weather and pain have studied people diagnosed with arthritis. After reviewing many case reports, Rentshler reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1929, that there was strong evidence that "warm weather is beneficial and barometric pressure changes are detrimental to patients with arthritis." However, arguing against the 1929 barometric pressure claim, in a 2016 article entitled, "Do Your Aches, Pains Predict Rain?", professor of atmospheric sciences, Dennis Driscoll, reportedly stated: "People need to realize that the pressure changes associated with storms are rather small." In fact, Driscoll observed that the changes associated with a storm are equivalent to what a person experiences in going up an elevator in a tall building and there haven't been many reports of people with arthritis hobbled by elevator rides in the medical literature. Still, many contend that joint pain actually predict weather changes. According to Robert Newlin Jamison, PhD, a professor in the departments of psychiatry and anesthesiology at Harvard Medical School, and a researcher who has studied weather's effects on chronic pain patients, it is common for people to blame increased pain on the weather. But, Jamison has seen patients worry about being ridiculed. "For whatever reason, people with chronic pain are real shy about saying it, because they think other people think they're nuts," he said. Jamison looked for an association between weather and chronic pain in four cities: San Diego, Nashville, Boston, and cold Worcester and published an article in the journal *Pain.*, which found, “Two-thirds said they were pretty sure that weather seems to affect their pain.” “They could feel some increased pain the day before the storm comes.”

In the America that I love, in spite of plausible theories involving barometric pressure, there is no full agreement among scientists that weather causes pain. Inconclusive outcomes are a frequent occurrence.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell

[rhowesmd@hughes.net](mailto:rhowesmd@hughes.net) | [www.iwillfindthecure.org](http://www.iwillfindthecure.org)

