

Back Pain in Cold Weather

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Many people who suffer from frequent pain in their backs and joints can testify that their soreness is worse in cold weather. While the reasons for this vary depending on the condition, treating and preventing pain during the winter months is of major importance to chiropractors, particularly as patients may be at increased risk of injury if their movement is restricted.

Why is Pain Worse in Winter?

Evidence is mixed and relatively scant regarding low temperatures directly causing back pain. However, cold does cause muscles, ligaments, and tendons to seize up, making them sore from exertion and more easily torn or sprained. This is especially a problem for people with scoliosis, whose muscles are always compensating for uneven weight distribution. People with arthritis also report pain or tingling in response to drops in barometric pressure. This is due to body tissues expanding, putting increased pressure on joints and nerves. The effect atmospheric changes have on people seems to be determined by the relative change from what they are used to more than the absolute change in temperature or pressure. So, for example, a person from Puerto Rico might react to a ten-degree drop in temperature similarly to a person from Detroit reacting to a thirty-degree drop.

How to Prevent Aches and Sprains

Preventing the body from seizing up in response to cold requires it to be kept both well-insulated and limber. Wearing thick clothing and heavy boots can reduce the impact of the cold, but back problems can also develop from wearing shoes that don't have strong arch support. One solution is to keep a separate pair of shoes at the workplace and to only wear snow boots while traveling.

Lack of flexibility is a bigger problem because the cold weather often dissuades people from going to the gym and low light levels have a psychological impact which further reduces some peoples' motivation to stay active. However, there are a lot of workout routines which can be done at home and exercising regularly raises a person's energy level, making it easier to sustain once started. Dynamic stretches done before going outside will warm the muscles, allowing people to catch themselves from slipping more quickly and make them less likely to develop a stress fracture. It is certainly a good practice to do warm-ups before shoveling snow or doing other outdoor tasks and to do cool-down stretches afterward.

Chiropractic Treatments

But even the most careful approaches are unlikely to completely prevent back pain, which is why chiropractic offices are equipped with multiple non-invasive, non-addictive therapies. Heat treatments can loosen up muscles in a way that is more skin-friendly than long showers. Electric muscle stimulation and ultrasounds are often offered as ways of relieving discomfort from tense or strained tissues, as well as facilitating their healing. Adjustments are used to relieve pressure on nerves from swollen tissue, and therapeutic exercise can be designed to meet an arthritis patient's particular needs.