9 Tips for Coping With Chronic Pain in the Summer

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Managing Chronic Pain In The Summer

Summer is associated with fun and relaxation. However, for many people with chronic pain, the heat and humidity of summer weather mean an increase in pain levels. This can make coping with chronic pain in the summer more difficult.

However, you can still enjoy the summer months with some of my suggested tips for coping with chronic pain in the summer.

What Causes Increased Pain in the Summer?

Weather can directly affect the symptoms of common chronic pain conditions. Below are a few common reasons for feeling increased pain during the summer months:

- **High humidity or low pressure conditions.** They can trigger baroreceptors, causing uncomfortable pressure in your joints. You may feel this as tightness or stiffness in your joints.
- **Dehydration.** This is more likely during hot summer weather and can reduce the fluid in your joints. Since joint fluid helps to lubricate movement, less fluid can lead to more pain.
- **Trouble regulating body temperature.** People with fibromyalgia are also affected by summer weather. People with fibromyalgia have trouble regulating their body temperature, especially when exposed to weather extremes (hot or cold). Specifically, exposure to hot temperatures can lead to muscle pain, headaches, fatigue, anxiety and depression.
- **Insomnia.** This is another significant cause of increased pain in the summer (often called *painsomnia* in the chronic pain community). Sleeping during the hot summer nights can be difficult. Many studies show that poor quality sleep causes increased pain levels. Keeping cool at night is a top priority for people with chronic pain.
- **Exerting yourself more than usual.** During this season, people tend to be more active. Summer invites activities can include walking outdoors, picnics and swimming. Special events often take place in the summer, like weddings, national holidays, or vacations.

Strategies for Pain Management in Warm Weather

1. Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate

In the summer, it is even more crucial to drink your eight glasses of water a day. You lose more water from your body through perspiration. It's important to replace that water, so you do not become dehydrated. Dehydration can lead to headaches, muscle cramps, fatigue and heat exhaustion, which can all exacerbate chronic pain symptoms.

Carrying a water bottle with you throughout the day is one of the best ways to stay hydrated. If you don't like

water, try herbal or non-caffeinated tea, soup broth, or coconut water.

Avoid more than one to two cups of coffee, as well as sugary drinks like soda, juice or sports drinks. If you have trouble remembering to drink, try having a glass of water before each meal, as well as when you wake up and go to bed to make it a routine.

2. Don't Forget Electrolytes

An often overlooked aspect of dehydration is replacing electrolytes lost by sweating. Electrolytes are substances that carry an electric charge and are responsible for nerve and muscle function, blood pressure, blood pH and other vital bodily functions. They also include sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium.

One excellent source of electrolytes is from eating fresh fruits. Another is coconut water. Sport drinks also contain electrolytes but can be very sugary, so remember only to consume these drinks in moderation.

3. Stay Cool at Home

It's important to try to maintain a constant, cool temperature during a heat wave. Air conditioning and fans can help to keep a cooler indoor temperature.

If you don't have air conditioning, try having a cool, refreshing shower or wiping your face, neck arms and legs with a damp. Applying an ice pack to the back of your neck or the inside of your wrists can also help.

If humidity worsens your pain, consider running a dehumidifier in your home.

4. Stay Cool on the Go

Try a cooling fitness towel when you are out and about. When wet, these towels become cooler than the air temperature and provide relief from the heat (but remain dry to the touch). They can also wick away moisture from perspiration.

You can also try a portable fan. One smart device I recently discovered is a micro USB fan that can plug into your smartphone!

5. Sun Protection

This is key to avoid flare-ups that may be caused by sunburn or heat exhaustion. Try to stay out of direct sunlight, use sunscreen, wear a hat, etc.

6. Replace Heat Therapy With Cold Therapy

If you routinely use a heating pad for your pain, try replacing it with an ice pack, especially during a heat wave.

7. Pacing

If you are unfamiliar with this strategy, pacing involves alternating activity with periods of rest to avoid overexertion.

This is particularly essential during the increased activity levels we often associate with summer months. It's important to stick to your boundaries, no matter what expectations friends or family members may place on you.

8. Consider an Activity Tracker

I find a wearable tracker quite helpful for making sure I don't overexert myself. It can be difficult to compare different events, like a neighborhood walk with an afternoon by the beach. Knowing how many steps I have taken

helps me to pace myself during the day.

9. Log Your Symptoms

If you are unsure what effect the weather has on your pain levels, try keeping a daily log of the temperature and weather conditions, along with your pain levels.

This might help you to identify pain triggers. You can also note any strategies you have tried to reduce your pain levels and what impact they may have had.

Over time, this will help you to identify more practical solutions for coping with pain in the summer months.