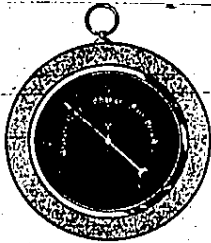


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age) are in for trouble. If, after sedentary months, they insist on shoveling snow — well, you've read about them in the obituary columns. Moreover, in the winter the endocrine system slows down. Bears hibernate, we don't; but our glands show some signs of wanting-us-to. One of these, the adrenal cortex, supplies hormone known as cortisone, and when the supply is reduced, there is more suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, for which cortisone has been found to be specifically helpful.

At either extreme of temperature, the cells in our body tissues swell. When strong winds blast off the polar ice fields, or there is no wind at all to blow hot, moisture-laden air away, you'll feel the aches and pains of neuritis, a "trick" knee, a "bad" ankle, bunions. And, of course, the membranes in the nose and throat, always sensitive, are particularly vulnerable to bacteria when subjected to abnormal conditions (these include quick shifts from airconditioning to non-airconditioning). It is a gloomy fact that deaths in any segment of our population jump by a third in the months of January, February, and March.

Before we go on to the effects of heat and humidity, it is useful to note that the human thermostat is located at the base of the brain and in the brain stem. Not much is known yet about the meaning of what happens when this vital link loses its sensitivity, but it may well be that disease is related to its failure to function. In other words, our ability to adjust to the weather may have much to do with our physical health. It certainly has a great deal to do with mental health. Indeed, one of the symptoms of neurosis is an inability to adjust easily. Mental patients are at their most disturbed when the weather fluctuates, and if you've ever had "the jitters" before a thunderstorm, there's a good reason.

Heat, Humidity, Homicide

It seems that when a "low" or storm is approaching and the barometer is falling — even before you see those dark clouds massing or find yourself listening to the weird hush that seems to descend on the earth — the body tissues, trying to adjust to the change in atmospheric pressure, operate somewhat on the principle of a sponge and take up additional water from the intestinal tract. In short, they swell. This not only makes Grandpa's rheumatism bother him, so that, as he says, he can "feel" a storm coming, but it provokes serious consequences in his head as well. The brain, constructed as it is within a hard skull, can't swell — or not much. A headache, a feeling of despondency, nervous tension are results. This is when your grandmother went to lie down with a handkerchief soaked in cologne — and when you may start snapping at an obstreperous child, who is in turn no doubt merely giving vent to his own uneasiness. Oddly enough, however, it has been established that unless they're scared senseless, many people are at their most efficient mentally during the actual thunderstorm!

Excessive heat is demonstrably the most demoralizing of all weather conditions. Besides hoisting the blood pressure, its effect on the metabolism means that it also affects the thyroid. There are vital statistics and police records to

reveal that suicides, violence, and crimes of passion increase during a heat wave. That is, they do up to a point; when it gets too hot (say over 80°), there isn't so much energy left. According to a report made by Drs. George E. Burch and Albert Hyman of New Orleans to an American Heart Association meeting in 1956, heat and humidity make even a healthy heart work harder, so that mild exercise in such circumstances is worse than strenuous activity on a cool, dry day. As a happier footnote, a hot spell also seems to bring on a rush of business in the maternity wards.

Individuals Vary

Needless to say, individuals differ in their reactions to weather. Thin people have a hard time in the cold and are prone to feel unhappy. Abraham Lincoln was a notorious example: he was always gloomy during a cold spell, and as a matter of record, it was during a severe and prolonged winter that he had a near collapse and so strangely broke his engagement to Mary Todd. Stout people, as is easily observed, suffer more in the heat. General health is also, naturally, an important factor in one's response: A body already coping with an illness is burdened all the more by a need to seek equilibrium with the temperature. But just about everybody suffers when the humidity is high; the pressure, without and within, is just too much, and an outburst of temper is, quite literally, an inevitable explosion.

"Why talk about it? You can't change it."

That's probably as common a conversation-stopper as "Hot (or cold) enough for you today?" is an opening gambit. But just as it's no longer so apt to say that something is as unreachable as the moon, it is now not so thoroughly accurate to suppose that there's nothing you can do about the weather.

Benefits In Change of Climate

Anyone can — and should — make sensible adaptations in diet and clothing. Mechanical measures can control the conditions indoors and keep comfortable and contented there. And, of course, if desirable and practicable, you can move to another climate. Elderly people especially are quite right to seek out the milder, drier places.

It would be misleading, though, to suggest that a change of climate will necessarily cure all ills. A group of doctors in Maricopa County, Arizona, became concerned at the disappointment of many people who had come to the area in search of better health, and in 1956 they organized the Institute of Medical Climatology to collect information on the effect of climate on specific diseases and to give frank answers to inquiries. They have found that the local climate does help some conditions but not others. It relieves osteoarthritis but not rheumatoid arthritis. It seems to benefit certain skin ailments such as eczema and acne, but it does not cure heart disease, though it does enable cardiac patients to breathe more easily. As the doctors wisely point out, the fact that many patients feel better when they have moved to a new spot may be because they've left behind some of the problems and frustrations which were contributing to their difficulties. So it is still possible that a change of scene can be beneficial in more ways than one.

Most people, of course, have no opportunity for a change of climate — weatherproof or not, you take it as it comes. But there is one more thing you can do about it — relax and be philosophical. "This too will pass," you might try saying to yourself, and the chances are that you and the weather will then get along much better together.



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