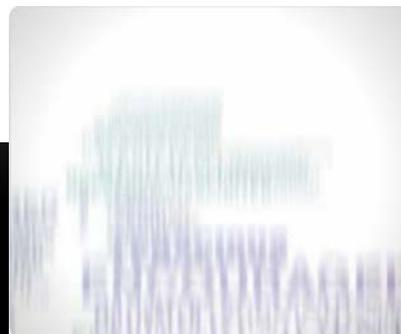


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Fighting Off the Fibromyalgia Winter Blues

Brrr! When the winter wind howls, fibromyalgia symptoms can worsen. Stay warm with these cold-weather strategies.



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Winter can be a difficult time for many people because of the cold weather, minimal sunlight, and shorter days. But what's surprising, says Anthony P. Geraci, MD, founder and medical director of the neuroOasis Headache and Pain Center in New York City, is that weather that's a bit on the cold side can actually be somewhat comforting for people with **fibromyalgia**.

"Most will say that the warm and humid months are bad for their **pain**," Dr. Geraci explains. "Cold weather is less likely to make one sweat and can have beneficial effects on the pain centers in the brain."

However, if you have pain and other fibromyalgia symptoms, you might feel negative effects in areas with extreme cold in the **winter** or when the temperature fluctuates a great deal. "A cold breeze blowing across an already-energy-deficient muscle will throw it into shortening, and shortened muscles are the primary and key cause of pain," says Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, medical director of Fibromyalgia & Fatigue Centers, a nationwide group of clinics.

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Combating Cold Weather

When your fibromyalgia symptoms flare in bone-chilling temperatures, try these strategies to warm up and relieve the pain:

Dip into a nightly bath. Studies have shown that taking warm or hot baths can have a therapeutic effect for fibromyalgia pain. If you take a soothing bath each night during the winter, it will have the secondary effect of warming your bones and taking away any chill that's contributing to fibromyalgia pain and symptoms.

Dress appropriately for the weather. Tight **clothing** can often be a bother for people with fibromyalgia symptoms, so go for warm yet loose-fitting clothes. Dressing in layers can allow you to stay toasty and also quickly adjust by removing a layer if you get too hot. Also, make sure to have the appropriate accessories, like gloves, hats, scarves, and warm boots, to help fight the cold when you have to head outside. "Interestingly, wearing wool long underwear and T-shirts, wearing wool pajamas, and having wool sheets and pillowcases can be as effective as pain medications for decreasing fibromyalgia pain but without the side effects," says Dr. Teitelbaum. He explains that wool keeps the muscles warm and relaxed while wicking away the moisture from excess sweating.

Try hand warmers. Store-bought hand warmers that generate heat when you open them can also ease fibromyalgia symptoms, says Stephen Soloway, MD, a rheumatologist in private practice in Vineland, N.J.

Avoid alcohol. Dr. Soloway explains that alcoholic drinks can dilate blood vessels and cause heat loss.

Be vigilant about sweat. If you find yourself sweating in the winter, blot off the perspiration and change into dry clothes as soon as possible. Nothing causes chills that lead to fibromyalgia symptoms more than being wet from your own **sweat**.

These daily strategies should help ease symptoms. However, if you find that winter flares make you miserable, you might need to consider a move to a warmer, dry climate. Granted, this is not a solution that will work for everyone, but if your quality of life suffers for three or more months out of the year, it's worth considering.

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