

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Aloha! Is Hitting the Beach Good for your Rheumatoid Arthritis?

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Plain Language Summary:

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a disease that affects over 1% of the world's population, affecting women three times as often as men. It usually occurs between the ages of 40-60, and causes many of the joints of the body to become stiff, swollen, and painful.

Specifically, the joints of the hands, knees, and elbows often become swollen and deformed, and patients with RA typically experience severe pain and stiffness upon waking in the morning. Several treatments are available for RA, including ibuprofen, steroids, and other medication.

Many individuals state that their arthritis is affected by the weather. The general belief is that warm and dry climates are better for arthritis, while cool and wet climates exacerbate RA symptoms. In a paper published in 2004, researchers examined a group of studies performed in the last twenty years. They concluded that there is a relationship between temperature and humidity, and that a warm and dry climate does lead to some reduction in joint pain, swelling, and stiffness. Additionally, there is even some laboratory data that shows that a test for inflammation called the ESR may change in response to the climate you are in.

The evidence presented in this article needs further examination, and the relief that a change in climate could provide has not been proven as an effective replacement for traditional medication and therapies. Hopefully, more research will continue to be done in this area, and the next time your doctor writes you a prescription it will read, "For RA – Sunscreen and Sunshine!"

Additional Resources:

For more information:

Medline Plus:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15229951>

Medline Plus:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001467/>

Support Group Information:

<http://www.dailystrength.org/c/Rheumatoid-Arthritis/support-group>

Key Words:

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Humidity

Temperature

Morning Stiffness

Joint pain

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