

Temperature, Humidity May Increase Gout Risks

BY JEFF EVANS
Senior Writer

WASHINGTON — High temperature and humidity seem to increase the risk of recurrent gout attacks independently of other known risk factors, Yuqing Q. Zhang, D.Sc., reported at the annual meeting of the American College of Rheumatology.

"Although the pathophysiology of gout is well understood and efficacious clinical therapies are available, many patients with gout still suffer from recurrent gout attacks" brought on by certain risk factors, said Dr. Zhang of Boston University.

Decreases in intravascular volume from perspiration in hot, humid weather can result in high serum uric acid levels because of a reduction in uric acid excretion, Dr. Zhang said. Few studies have examined the link between risk factors for dehydration and the risk of recurrent gout attacks.

Dr. Zhang and his colleagues enrolled 197 patients with a median 5-year history of gout through an online advertisement. The patients answered a "hazard period" questionnaire on a Web site that asked about risk factors for gout attacks during the 2-day period before reporting an attack. They also filled out a control period questionnaire every 3 months for 1 year to pro-

vide data about time intervals between gout attacks. They were asked about medication use (such as diuretics), alcohol use, food intake (especially foods rich in purine or with little purine), and details of gout attacks when they occurred.

Weather information from more than 1,600 U.S. airports was provided by the Weather Underground Web site (www.wunderground.com). Each type of weather was divided into quintile groups to determine its impact on the risk of gout at-

tack. As temperature during the 2 days before a gout attack increased from the lowest quintile (0-53°F) to the highest quintile (87-105°F), the relative risk of a gout attack doubled. The dose-response relationship between temperature and recurrent gout attacks seemed to suggest a threshold effect such that when the temperature reached 85°F, the risk of recurrent gout attacks increased dramatically, according to Dr. Zhang.

The relationship between the level of

humidity during the 2 days before a gout attack and the risk of recurrent attacks followed the pattern for temperature very closely. High humidity seemed to be the strongest predictor for recurrent gout attacks, but very cold and dry weather also slightly increased the risk.

The findings were significant after controlling for medication use, alcohol consumption, and purine-rich food intake. Recurrent attacks were not associated with barometric pressure or precipitation. ■

Usual Knee X-Ray Views May Not Show Damage

SAN FRANCISCO — Physicians who are treating patients with knee injury or possible arthritis may initially be inclined to order anterior-posterior and lateral views—or sunrise views—of the knee and occasionally even an MRI. But in most cases, the resulting films are not particularly useful and can actually be misleading, Dr. W. Dilworth Cannon said at a conference on sports medicine sponsored by the University of California, San Francisco.

Dr. Cannon, of the department of orthopaedic surgery at UCSF, said he regards the supine anterior-posterior (AP) view of the knee to be "pretty worthless unless the patient can't stand. ... Someone could have severe advanced degenerative arthritis, and if you just look at the AP, you may miss it."

Although the supine lateral is worth ordering, a posterior-anterior (PA) bent-knee standing film is better than the supine AP. The patient faces away from the x-ray tube, with knees placed against the cassette and bent at least 25 degrees; the x-ray beam is aimed 10 degrees caudally, which provides a more useful view of the joint.

Dr. Cannon specifies a 30-degree or 45-degree patellofemoral axial view.

Dr. Cannon also suggested that physicians not order MRIs and instead, leave them to the orthopedic surgeon. He said many of the MRIs that come into his office from primary care physicians are of relatively poor quality.

—Robert Finn

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