



Commentary

Keep the Clothes Dry: A Simple Habit Worth Considering for Long-Term Health

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ABSTRACT

Background: Simple health behaviors adopted during childhood can influence long-term health outcomes. One commonly overlooked practice is the prompt changing of wet clothing after swimming, rain exposure, or heavy perspiration. While this behavior has traditionally been emphasized in many cultures, its potential implications for chronic disease prevention have received limited scientific attention.

Objective: To examine the possible public health significance of avoiding prolonged exposure to wet clothing and to discuss potential links among musculoskeletal health, chronic pain, kidney disease, and cognitive decline.

Discussion: Traditional health practices have long suggested that repeated exposure to cold and damp conditions may adversely affect physical well-being. Although current scientific evidence does not support a direct causal relationship between wearing wet clothing and the development of arthritis, environmental factors may influence musculoskeletal discomfort and symptom severity. Arthritis remains a major cause of chronic pain and often necessitates long-term use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which may contribute to renal injury in susceptible individuals. Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is increasingly recognized as a risk factor for cognitive impairment and dementia through mechanisms involving vascular dysfunction, chronic inflammation, oxidative stress, and accumulation of uremic toxins. Emerging evidence highlights the interconnected nature of musculoskeletal, renal, and neurological health.

Conclusion: Promptly changing into dry clothing is a simple, low-cost, and low-risk health practice that promotes comfort and may support overall well-being. While direct evidence linking wet-clothing exposure to arthritis, CKD, or Alzheimer's disease is lacking, this longstanding preventive habit merits further scientific investigation. Encouraging children to remain warm and dry represents a practical public health message that may contribute to lifelong healthy behaviors.

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Introduction

Public health advances often arise from simple behavioral changes adopted early in life. Hand washing, seat belt use, sun protection, and regular physical activity have all demonstrated how small daily habits can influence long-term health outcomes. Another widely practiced but less studied health behavior is the prompt change of wet clothing after swimming, rain exposure, or heavy perspiration. While commonly regarded as a matter of comfort, some cultures consider prolonged wearing wet clothes a potential health risk.

Across many Asian countries, parents routinely encourage children to change into dry clothing immediately after exposure to water. This practice is rooted in traditional beliefs that prolonged cold and damp exposure may adversely affect health. In contrast, many American children and adolescents commonly remain in wet swimsuits or damp clothing for extended periods, particularly during recreational activities. Although robust scientific evidence linking this habit directly to chronic diseases remains limited, the subject raises important questions regarding environmental exposures, inflammation,

musculoskeletal health, and long-term disease prevention.

Revisiting Traditional Wisdom Through a Modern Medical Lens

Traditional medical systems have long proposed that chronic exposure to cold and damp conditions may contribute to musculoskeletal discomfort and joint-related symptoms. Modern medicine does not recognize wet clothing as a direct cause of arthritis. Osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and other arthritic disorders are multi-factorial conditions influenced by genetics, aging, immune dysregulation, obesity, injury, and lifestyle factors.

Nevertheless, many individuals with arthritis report worsening symptoms during cold or damp weather. While the exact biological mechanisms remain under investigation, environmental factors may influence pain perception, muscle tension, circulation, or inflammatory signaling. These observations suggest that prolonged exposure to cold, wet conditions may affect comfort and symptom severity, even if it does not directly cause disease.

The question therefore warrants further scientific exploration: could repeated exposure to prolonged chilling during childhood contribute to musculoskeletal vulnerability later in life? At present, definitive evidence is lacking, but the hypothesis deserves objective investigation rather than dismissal.

The Broader Consequences of Chronic Pain

Arthritis remains one of the leading causes of chronic pain and disability in the United States. Millions of patients rely on nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), including ibuprofen and naproxen, for symptom management. Although these medications are highly effective for pain relief, long-term and excessive use has been associated with adverse renal effects in susceptible individuals.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) affects millions of Americans and represents a major public health challenge. The causes of CKD are complex and include diabetes, hypertension, genetic disorders, cardiovascular disease, and medication-related injury. While arthritis itself does not inevitably lead to kidney disease, prolonged dependence on certain analgesic medications may contribute to renal dysfunction in some patients.

Emerging Connections Between Kidney and Brain Health

Increasing evidence suggests that kidney health and brain health are closely interconnected. Individuals with CKD experience higher rates of cognitive impairment, memory difficulties, and dementia compared with those with normal kidney function. Several mechanisms may explain this association, including vascular injury, chronic inflammation, oxidative stress, metabolic disturbances, and the accumulation of uremic toxins.

Research has demonstrated several important observations:

- Individuals with CKD have an elevated risk of cognitive decline and dementia.
- Cognitive impairment may occur even during the early stages of kidney dysfunction.
- Children and adolescents with CKD can exhibit deficits in attention, memory, and executive function.
- Shared risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease contribute to both kidney and neuro-degenerative disorders.
- Improved management of kidney disease and cardiovascular risk factors may help preserve cognitive function.

These findings highlight the importance of preventive strategies that support kidney health throughout the lifespan.

A Public Health Opportunity

While no definitive evidence currently demonstrates that wearing wet clothing during childhood causes arthritis, kidney disease, or Alzheimer's disease, encouraging children to change promptly into dry clothes remains a sensible and low-risk health practice. Dry clothing helps maintain thermal comfort, reduces prolonged exposure to cold and damp conditions, and may decrease the risk of skin irritation or other discomforts. Importantly, this recommendation represents a practical behavioral intervention with virtually no downside. Public health messaging often succeeds when it promotes simple, achievable actions that families can easily incorporate into daily life.

Practical Recommendations for Families

Parents and caregivers may consider adopting the following habits:

1. **Change Wet Clothing Promptly:** Children should change into dry clothing after swimming, prolonged rain exposure, or heavy sweating whenever feasible.
2. **Keep Spare Clothing Available:** Families visiting pools, beaches, sporting events, or outdoor activities should carry an extra set of dry garments.
3. **Promote Thermal Comfort:** Maintaining body warmth after water exposure may improve comfort and reduce prolonged chilling.
4. **Educate Without Alarm:** Parents should present changing into dry clothing as a healthy routine rather than as protection from specific diseases that have not been scientifically linked to wet-clothing exposure.

Conclusion

The relationship between childhood environmental exposures and adult chronic disease remains an active area of investigation. Although current scientific evidence does not establish a direct causal pathway from wearing wet clothing to arthritis, chronic kidney disease, or Alzheimer's disease, the longstanding practice of promptly changing into dry clothes represents a simple, low-cost, and potentially beneficial health habit. Future research may help clarify whether repeated exposure to cold and damp conditions has measurable long-term effects on musculoskeletal, renal, or neurological health. Until then, encouraging children to stay warm, dry, and comfortable remains a reasonable and practical public health message.