

1 **Estimations of the weather effects on brain functions using functional MRI: a cautionary note**

2 Xin Di ^{1,2}, Marie Wolfer ^{1,3,4}, Simone Kühn ^{5,6}, Zhiguo Zhang ^{7,8}, Bharat B. Biswal ^{1,2,*}

3

4 1. Department of Biomedical Engineering, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Newark, NJ, 07102, USA

5 2. School of Life Sciences and Technology, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China,

6 Chengdu, China

7 3. Clinical Affective Neuroimaging Laboratory (CANLAB), Otto-von-Guericke-University Magdeburg,

8 Magdeburg, Germany

9 4. Department for Behavioral Neurology, Leibniz Institute for Neurobiology, Magdeburg, Germany

10 5. Center for Lifespan Psychology, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany

11 6. Clinic and Polyclinic for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University Clinic Hamburg-Eppendorf,

12 Germany

13 7. School of Biomedical Engineering, Health Science Center, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, China

14 8. Guangdong Provincial Key Laboratory of Biomedical Measurements and Ultrasound Imaging,

15 Shenzhen, China

16

17 * Corresponding author:

18 Bharat B. Biswal, PhD

19 607 Fenster Hall, University Height

20 Newark, NJ, 07102, USA

21 bbiswal@yahoo.com

22

23 **Abstract**

24 The influences of environmental factors such as weather on the human brain are still largely unknown. A
25 few neuroimaging studies have demonstrated seasonal effects, but were limited by their cross-sectional
26 design or sample sizes. Most importantly, the stability of the MRI scanner hasn't been taken into account,
27 which may also be affected by environments. In the current study, we analyzed longitudinal resting-state
28 functional MRI (fMRI) data from eight individuals, where the participants were scanned over months to
29 years. We applied machine learning regression to use different resting-state parameters, including the
30 amplitude of low-frequency fluctuations (ALFF), regional homogeneity (ReHo), and functional
31 connectivity matrix, to predict different weather and environmental parameters. For careful control, the
32 raw EPI and the anatomical images were also used for predictions. We first found that daylight length
33 and air temperatures could be reliably predicted with cross-validation using the resting-state parameters.
34 However, similar prediction accuracies could also be achieved by using one frame of EPI image, and even
35 higher accuracies could be achieved by using segmented or raw anatomical images. Finally, the signals
36 outside of the brain in the anatomical images and signals in phantom scans could also achieve higher
37 prediction accuracies, suggesting that the predictability may be due to the baseline signals of the MRI
38 scanner. After all, we did not identify detectable influences of weather on brain functions other than the
39 influences on the baseline signals of MRI scanners. The results highlight the difficulty of studying long-
40 term effects using MRI.

41

42 **Keywords:** daylight length, environmental effects on the brain, machine learning regression, resting-state,
43 scanner stability, temperature, weather.

44

45 **1. Introduction**

46 Daily environmental factors such as weather and seasonality affect mood and cognitive functions (Cedeño
47 Laurent et al., 2018; Denissen et al., 2008; IJzerman et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2005; Lim et al., 2018), and
48 may lead to pathological affective disorder (Elseoud et al., 2014; Kurlansik and Ibay, 2012). The effects
49 on individuals may be small, but the collective effects may lead to broader impacts, e.g. on stock markets
50 (Hirshleifer and Shumway, 2003; Saunders, 1993). To better understand the effects of weather and
51 seasonality on mood or cognition, it is critical to study their effects on brain functions. A few human
52 neuroimaging studies have explored this association. Seasonal effects on brain functions as measured by
53 functional MRI (fMRI) have been observed both in resting-state (Choe et al., 2015) and when performing
54 cognitive tasks (Meyer et al., 2016). Some neural transmitter activity in the striatum also showed
55 seasonal effects, i.e. serotonin transmitter binding as measured by ^{11}C -labeled 3-amino-4-(2-
56 dimethylaminomethyl-phenylsulfanyl)-benzotrile (^{11}C)DASB) positron emission tomography (PET)
57 (Kalbitzer et al., 2010; Mc Mahon et al., 2016; Praschak-Rieder et al., 2008) and dopamine synthesis as
58 measured by ^{18}F -DOPA PET (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Kaasinen et al., 2012). A study even reported
59 seasonal changes of hippocampal volumes in human subjects (Miller et al., 2015).

60 There are several limitations in these neuroimaging studies. First, most of these studies are cross-
61 sectional, which is limited by the large individual differences in brain functions (Gordon et al., 2017). In
62 addition, most of the studies examined roughly defined seasonal effects or yearly periodical effects. But
63 the exact phase of the seasonal variations may be different from the four seasons. Sometimes the yearly
64 effects showed different phases (Meyer et al., 2016), suggesting more complicated relationships of
65 environmental factors on brain functions. Therefore, it is critical to examine which environmental
66 parameters, such as weather, have more contributions to the seasonal effects. Among different
67 environmental parameters, daylight length and temperature represent the significant environmental
68 differences in seasonal fluctuations. Gillihan et al have explored the weather effects on brain functions
69 using a small cross-sectional sample (Gillihan et al., 2011). They identified a weather index related to

70 mood and showed that the weather index was correlated with resting-state cerebral blood flow as
71 measured by arterial spin labeling (ASL) perfusion fMRI mainly in the insula. But more systematic
72 examinations of weather effects on brain functions have not been performed. Lastly, the most commonly
73 used neuroimaging method is fMRI based on blood-oxygen-level dependent (BOLD) signals (Ogawa et
74 al., 1990), where the interpretation of the results should consider neuronal level, neurophysiological level,
75 and the underlying physical level of the scanner. Specifically, if some effects on fMRI signals were
76 observed, they may be due to the changes in neuronal activity, which is favorable to psychologists and
77 psychiatrists. But the effects may also due to the changes in neurovascular coupling (Di et al., 2013;
78 Yuan et al., 2013), in brain structures, or even the stability of the MRI scanner. Therefore, when
79 examining the weather effects on brain functions, alternative factors need to be considered and carefully
80 controlled.

81 The purpose of the current study is to estimate to what extent resting-state brain functions were
82 affected by the weather. We analyzed longitudinal resting-state fMRI data from eight individuals from
83 three datasets, where the individuals were scanned over periods of months to years (Choe et al., 2015;
84 Filevich et al., 2017; Poldrack et al., 2015). One challenge for estimating weather effects is that the
85 effects may be small. Therefore, we applied a machine learning regression approach to evaluate the
86 effects. Because multiple brain regions have been implicated in seasonal effects, e.g. basal ganglia
87 (Kalbitzer et al., 2010; Mc Mahon et al., 2016; Prashak-Rieder et al., 2008), insula (Gillihan et al., 2011),
88 and hippocampus (Miller et al., 2015), small regional effects may be aggregated into detectable effects
89 using machine learning technique. We performed a within-subject prediction analysis at the single-
90 subject level. We asked what weather parameters have the most effects on resting-state brain functions,
91 which can be represented as high prediction accuracies in predictions of these parameters. In order to rule
92 out possible confounding effects that might give rise to prediction, we also performed several control
93 prediction analyses. First, we analyzed anatomical MRI images to check whether the observed prediction

94 could be attributed to anatomical variations. Second, we checked images from phantom data to examine
 95 whether the prediction could be attributed to the stability of the MRI scanner.

96

97 **2. Materials and methods:**

98 **2.1. MRI datasets**

99 Several multi-session resting-state fMRI datasets were pooled together, where the subjects were scanned
 100 over periods of months to years. The first subject was derived from the Kirby sample (Choe et al., 2015),
 101 where the single subject was scanned for 156 sessions over three and half years. The second subject was
 102 from the Myconnectome sample (Poldrack et al., 2015), where the subject was scanned 90 times over one
 103 and half years. The remaining six subjects were from the Day2day sample (Filevich et al., 2017), where
 104 the subjects were scanned over a similar span of about half a year. The detailed subject and scan
 105 information is listed in Table 1.

106

107 **Table 1** Subject and MRI scan information.

	Dataset	Sex	Age	# of sessions	First scan	Last scan	# of volumes	TR (s)	Voxel size (mm ³)
1	Kirby	M	40	156	2009/12/07	2013/06/20	198	2	3 x 3 x 4
2	MyConnectome	M	45	83	2012/10/23	2014/03/11	500	1.16	2.4 x 2.4 x 2.4
3	Day2day	F	23	50	2013/07/03	2013/12/18	148	2	3 x 3 x 3.6
4	Day2day	F	31	48	2013/07/03	2014/01/08	148	2	3 x 3 x 3.6
5	Day2day	F	29	45	2013/07/03	2014/01/27	148	2	3 x 3 x 3.6
6	Day2day	F	24	46	2013/07/02	2013/12/19	148	2	3 x 3 x 3.6
7	Day2day	M	30	39	2013/07/09	2014/02/12	148	2	3 x 3 x 3.6
8	Day2day	F	29	48	2013/07/03	2014/02/20	148	2	3 x 3 x 3.6

108

109 The number of sessions represents the effective numbers after dropout due to missing data or large head

110 motions. The numbers of volumes represent the numbers used in the analysis after removing the first
111 several volumes.

112

113 The MRI data from the Kirby sample were scanned using a 3T Philips Achieva scanner. The data
114 from the Myconnectome sample were scanned using a 3T Siemens Skyra scanner using a 32-channel
115 head coil. And the data from the Day2day project were scanned using a 3T Siemens Magnetom Trio
116 scanner using a 12-channel head coil. For each subject, resting-state fMRI data with multiple sessions
117 were acquired. Within a subject, the resting-state fMRI were scanned using the same imaging parameters,
118 but the parameters varied between different sites. Some essential resting-state fMRI parameters are listed
119 in Table 1. For more details, we refer the readers to the original articles.

120 High-resolution anatomical MRI images were available for only a few sessions in the Kirby and
121 Myconnectome datasets. An MRI image of one session was used to register all the functional images to
122 standard Montreal Neurological Institute (MNI) space. For the Day2day dataset, structural MRI images
123 were available for all the sessions. Only the structural MRI image of the last session of each subject was
124 used to aid preprocessing of the fMRI images. All the structural images of the Day2day project were also
125 used in the control prediction analysis.

126 Lastly, we obtained MRI scanner quality assurance agar phantom data from the Day2day site.
127 The images were scanned between June 2013 and February 2014 on a weekly basis (37 sessions in total).
128 One session's data were dropped because of extreme variations in the images. The data were acquired
129 using a gradient echo (GRE) sequence with the same coil as the one used for the acquisition of the human
130 data. Two images were acquired for each session. The parameters include: TR = 2000 ms; TE = 30 ms;
131 FOV = 22 cm; matrix = 64 x 64; slice number = 28; slice thickness = 4 mm (1 mm gap).

132 **2.2. Environmental data**

133 The MRI data were acquired from three different cities in two continents, Baltimore USA (Kirby), Austin
134 USA (Myconnectome), and Berlin Germany (Day2day), which reflect different types of climates. The

135 latitudes of these four cities are approximately 39 °N, 30 °N, and 52 °N, respectively. The weather data
136 for the two US cities were downloaded from (US) National Centers for Environmental Information
137 website (<https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo-web/>). The Local Climatological Data from Maryland Science
138 Center Station and Austin Camp Mabry Station were used to represent the weather for the Kirby and
139 Myconnectome datasets, respectively. We used the following measures, maximum and minimum
140 temperatures (Temp_{max} and Temp_{min}), air pressure (Press), wind speed (Wind), humidity (Hum), and
141 precipitation (Prcp). For those with missing data, we also checked Daily Summaries data from the
142 NOAA website. The weather data for the Day2day dataset were collected by the German researchers.
143 Daily sunshine hours were not used, because they were not available for the other datasets.

144 We also included daylight length (Dalg_t) in the current analysis. It was already available in the
145 NOAA Local Climatological Data. For the Day2day data, we calculated the daylight length in Berlin
146 according to its geographic location through the website of the Astronomical Applications Department of
147 the U.S. Naval Observatory computes (http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/Dur_OneYear.php). For the
148 Day2day dataset, there are three additional parameters that reflect local environmental variations, i.e.
149 scanner room temperature (Temp_{rm}), humidity (Hum_{rm}), and scanner Helium level (He). These three
150 parameters were also used in the prediction analysis when using the Day2day data.

151 **2.3. MRI data processing**

152 **2.3.1. Resting-state fMRI Preprocessing**

153 Data processing and statistical analysis were performed using MATLAB (R2017b). SPM12
154 (<http://www.fil.ion.ucl.ac.uk/spm/>; RRID:SCR_007037) was used for fMRI data preprocessing. The first
155 2, 18, and 2 functional images for each session were discarded for the Kirby, Myconnectome, and
156 Day2day datasets, respectively, remaining 198, 500, and 148 images for each session. For each subject,
157 all the functional images were realigned to the first session. All the prediction analysis was performed in
158 the native space of each subject. The anatomical images were coregistered to the mean functional image,
159 and then segmented into gray matter (GM), white matter (WM), cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), and other

160 tissues. For each subject, an intracranial volume mask was defined, and the grand mean (4-dimensional
161 average) of the functional images was calculated for each session. For each session, the functional
162 images were divided by the grand mean and multiplied by 100. At each voxel, Friston's 24 head motion
163 model (Friston et al., 1996), the first five principal components from WM signals and the first five
164 principal components from CSF signals were regressed out, and then band-pass filtering was applied
165 between 0.01 and 0.1 Hz. The images were not spatially smoothed, because there was no voxel-wise
166 univariate analysis involved.

167 The preprocessing steps were chosen to minimize potential artifacts due to physiological noises
168 and head motion. This may be an over-conservative choice that may compromise too many degrees of
169 freedom of the fMRI time series (Bright et al., 2017). We also tried to reduce the number of regressors
170 during the linear regression step. Specifically, we obtained the first two principal components of
171 Friston's 24 head motion variables. The regression then included the first two components of the head
172 motion model, the first component of WM signals, and the first component of the CSF signals (2 + 1 + 1
173 regressors compared with 24 + 5 + 5 regressors from the main analysis). The results using the reduced
174 regression were reported in the supplementary materials.

175 **2.3.2. ALFF, ReHo, and connectivity matrices**

176 We calculated three resting-state parameters to represent resting-state brain functions, i.e. amplitude of
177 low-frequency fluctuation (ALFF) (Zang et al., 2007) and regional homogeneity (ReHo) (Zang et al.,
178 2004) to represent regional properties, and connectivity matrix to represent inter-regional connectivity
179 property. ALFF and ReHo were calculated using the REST toolbox (REST: a toolkit for resting-state
180 fMRI, RRID:SCR_009641) (Song et al., 2011). Essentially, ALFF calculated the power of the time series
181 signals between 0.01 to 0.08 Hz at every voxel, resulting in an ALFF map for each session. ReHo
182 calculated the correlations of the current voxel with the 26 neighboring voxels, which also resulted in a
183 ReHo map for each session. The ALFF and ReHo values for each session within the subject's GM mask
184 were converted to a vector for further analysis. The subject-specific GM masks were defined as GM

185 intensity greater than 0.5 based on the segmentation of the subject's anatomical image. Because the GM
186 masks were defined in the native spaces and the fMRI resolution varies across datasets, the number of
187 within mask voxels also varied (from 20,780 to 55,368).

188 Correlation matrices were calculated among 164 regions of interest (Di and Biswal, 2019;
189 Dosenbach et al., 2010). Spherical ROIs were first defined in MNI space with a radius of 8 mm, and then
190 transformed into the native space for each subject. There were in total 13,366 connectivity values ($164 \times$
191 $(164 - 1) / 2$), which were converted to a vector for the prediction analysis. The correlation values were
192 transformed into Fishers' z scores.

193 **2.3.3. Head motion and other potential confounding variables**

194 To minimize the confounding of head motion in the prediction analysis, we first removed sessions with
195 large head motions. We calculated frame-wise displacement in translation and rotation directions (Di and
196 Biswal, 2015). A session's data with maximum frame-wise displacement greater than 1 mm or 1° were
197 discarded. No sessions were removed in the Kirby data, and seven sessions (7.8%) were removed for the
198 Myconnectome data. In the Day2day dataset, at most two sessions were removed for each subject.
199 Secondly, we regressed out 24 motion variables using Friston's head motion model, which has been
200 shown to be effective to minimize the effects of head motion on resting-state measures (Yan et al., 2013).
201 Lastly, mean frame-wise displacement of both directions were regressed out from a predicted
202 environmental variable before it was entered into the prediction analysis.

203 **2.3.4. Global signal**

204 The resting-state fMRI data have been scaled by the grand mean (4-D average) of each session to account
205 for the baseline signal variations across sessions. However, a recent study has reported an association
206 between global signal fluctuations and time of day (Orban et al., 2020). We, therefore, examined whether
207 the global signal fluctuations were associated with the environmental factors, and whether accounting for
208 the global signal fluctuations could affect the predictions of these environmental factors. We calculated
209 the averaged ALFF value in the intracranial mask to reflect the global signal fluctuations. The global

210 signal fluctuations were correlated with daylight length for each subject. Next, we also calculated mean
211 ALFF (mALFF) by dividing an ALFF map by the global mean. Prediction analysis was also performed
212 by using the mALFF maps.

213 **2.3.5. Structural MRI processing**

214 For the Day2day dataset, the MPRAGE anatomical MRI images were available for all the sessions.
215 Therefore, we used the anatomical images as a control condition for weather prediction. The analysis was
216 also performed in a subject's native space. The anatomical images from all the sessions of a subject were
217 realigned and resliced to the image of the first session. Then each session's image was segmented
218 separately, and the segmented tissue probability maps of GM, WM, and CSF were obtained. We defined
219 GM, WM, and CSF masks as an averaged probability greater than 0.5 for respective tissue types. GM,
220 WM, and CSF probability in their masks were extracted, respectively, to be used in the prediction
221 analysis.

222 We also defined an air mask to study the baseline MRI signals, which was located outside the
223 brain (Makedonov et al., 2013). The mask was placed at the lower left front side of the head to avoid
224 potential objects in the area, and was consisted of 21 x 41 x 41 voxels.

225 **2.3.6. Phantom image processing**

226 For each session, the two images were realigned, and an averaged image was calculated. Because the
227 phantom was imaged in a similar location, no cross-session registration was performed. We first
228 calculated correlations between daylight length and image values in every voxel, resulting in a correlation
229 image. Next, a cubic mask in the center of the image was defined. The signals within the mask were
230 extracted for the prediction analysis.

231 **2.4. Prediction analysis**

232 **2.4.1. Prediction analysis scheme**

233 The goal of the analysis is to estimate the prediction values of resting-state parameters on different
234 weather or meteorological parameters. The analysis was performed for each of the resting-state

235 parameters to predict each of the seven weather parameters. And we asked which weather parameters
236 could be better predicted by which resting-state parameters. The prediction analysis was all done in a
237 within-subject manner. Cross-validation was used to evaluate the prediction accuracies.

238 In addition to use these resting-state parameters, we also performed a series of control analyses to
239 use other potential confounding parameters to predict the environmental parameters. First, we used the
240 first fMRI image of each session after realignment to perform prediction analysis. Although the single
241 image still reflects BOLD effects, brain structures may contribute more variations. Secondly, to future
242 rule out the structural contribution, we used segmented tissue probabilities of GM, WM, and CSF from
243 their respective tissue masks to perform prediction analysis. Thirdly, we also extracted raw image values
244 from the MPRAGE images in the three tissue masks to serve as another control condition. In addition, a
245 cuboid mask was defined for each subject, which was located outside the brain. The raw image values
246 from the MPRAGE images from the air mask were used to control for baseline MRI signals. Finally,
247 since all of the above-mentioned analyses indicated prediction values to predict environmental parameters,
248 especially daylight length, we further analyzed the quality assurance phantom data, and used the signals
249 in the agar phantom area to perform prediction analysis to predict daylight length.

250 **2.4.2. Machine learning regression analysis**

251 We used a linear machine learning regression model to perform prediction analysis. The general form of
252 the prediction model is a linear regression model as the following:

$$253 \quad y = X \cdot \beta + \varepsilon$$

254 where y is a $n \times 1$ vector of a predicted weather parameter, X is a $n \times m$ matrix of a resting-state parameter,
255 β is the model parameters, and ε is the residual. N represents the number of observations, which in the
256 current analysis was the number of sessions for a particular subject. M represents the number of
257 prediction variables, which could be the number of voxels in the ALFF or ReHo maps (see Table 1) or the
258 number of connections (13,366) in the connectivity matrices. Here, m is much larger than n . Therefore,

259 we used ridge regression to estimate the β parameters. Briefly speaking, instead of trying to achieve the
260 goal of minimizing the sum of square means of the model prediction:

$$261 \quad \min_{\beta} \sum (y - X \cdot \beta)^2$$

262 Ridge regression adds one more regularized term:

$$263 \quad \min_{\beta} \sum (y - X \cdot \beta)^2 + \lambda \cdot \sum \|\beta\|^2$$

264 where λ represents the regularization parameter. The regularization term can constrain the sizes of beta
265 values, thus preventing overfitting of the model. In the current analysis, we used the MATLAB function
266 fitrlinear to perform the prediction analysis. There are other methods available, such as LASSO and
267 elastic net, but a recent study suggested that ridge regression and elastic net can yield similar prediction
268 accuracies while LASSO might perform worse in the scenario that the number of observations is much
269 smaller than the number of features (Cui and Gong, 2018).

270 There are three steps in the prediction analysis, 1) tuning the regularization parameter λ to find
271 the optimal λ (λ tuning), 2) training the model using the training dataset and the optimal λ to obtain a
272 prediction model β (model training), and 3) estimating prediction accuracy by calculating correlations
273 between predicted and actual values in a separate testing sample (cross-validation). Cross-validation was
274 used to make sure that the estimated prediction accuracies were independent of the training data.

275 Because of the limited number of data in one fold (13 observations in the least case), 3-fold cross-
276 validation was adopted. We used a nested tuning strategy to optimize the parameter λ (Cui and Gong,
277 2018). Specifically, we first held out one-third of the data as an independent testing dataset, and used the
278 remaining two-thirds of the data as a training and parameter tuning dataset. The data were first sorted
279 according to the tested weather parameter, and the three folds were defined as the 1st, 4th, 7th, ..., 2nd, 5th,
280 8th, ..., and 3rd, 6th, 9th, ... sessions of the data, respectively. Within the two-thirds training and parameter
281 tuning dataset, we first performed a nested loop of 3-fold analysis. Specifically, one-third of the data
282 were holden out, and the remaining two-thirds of data were used to train the regression model using a set

283 of λ values, from 10^{-5} to 10^{-1} in the logarithmic scale with a total of 15 values. The inner loop testing data
284 was used to test the accuracy of the prediction by calculating the correlation between predicted and actual
285 weather parameter values. This procedure was performed three times for the three folds, and the mean
286 accuracies were calculated for each of the λ values. The λ value with the highest mean accuracy was used
287 for the outer layer training data to train the model. The model was then applied to the outer layer testing
288 data to estimate prediction accuracies. The three accuracy values from the 3 folds were averaged to
289 represent an estimate of accuracy for a subject.

290 The prediction accuracies of different imaging parameters and environmental parameters were
291 visualized by using notBoxPlot (<https://github.com/raacampbell/notBoxPlot>). The plot shows not only
292 the individuals' prediction accuracies, but also the mean, standard deviation, and 95% confidence interval
293 of the accuracies across the subjects. False discovery rate (FDR) was used to correct for multiple
294 comparisons of the different parameters.

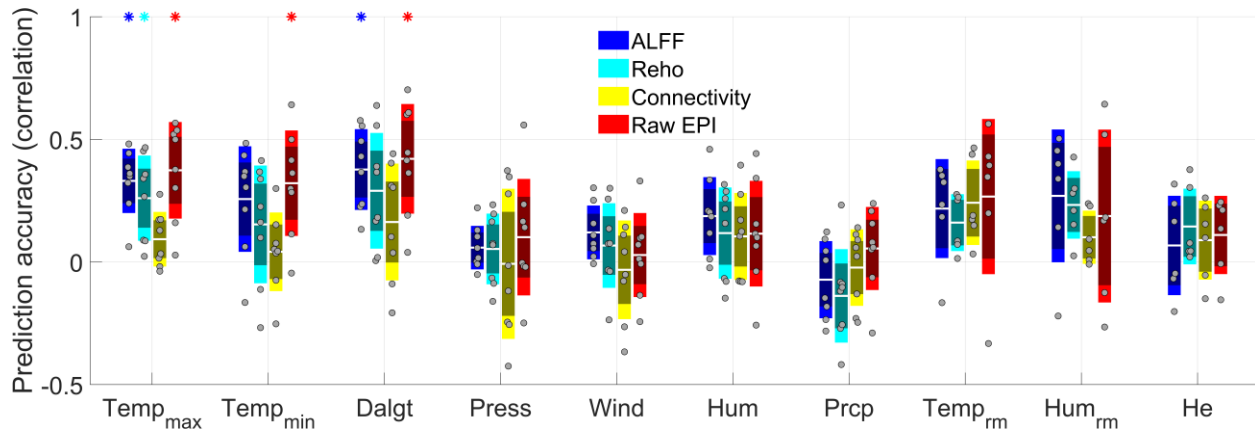
295

296 **3. Results**

297 **3.1. Predictions using the resting-state images**

298 We first performed predictions on different environmental parameters using the ALFF maps, ReHo maps,
299 connectivity matrices, as well as using a single frame of EPI images as a control condition (Figure 1). In
300 general, daylight length (Dalgt) and maximum and minimum environmental temperatures ($Temp_{max}$ and
301 $Temp_{min}$) had higher prediction accuracies, with daylight length usually having the highest prediction
302 accuracies. The other environmental parameters had very low prediction accuracies. In terms of the
303 resting-state parameters, the ALFF map usually had the highest prediction values. The average prediction
304 accuracy of daylight length using ALFF was 0.38. Surprisingly, however, using a single frame of EPI
305 images could achieve comparable and even higher prediction accuracies than any resting-state parameters.
306 The averaged prediction accuracy of daylight length using the raw EPI images was 0.42. When using the
307 resting-state parameters calculated from the reduced preprocessing method to perform the predictions, the

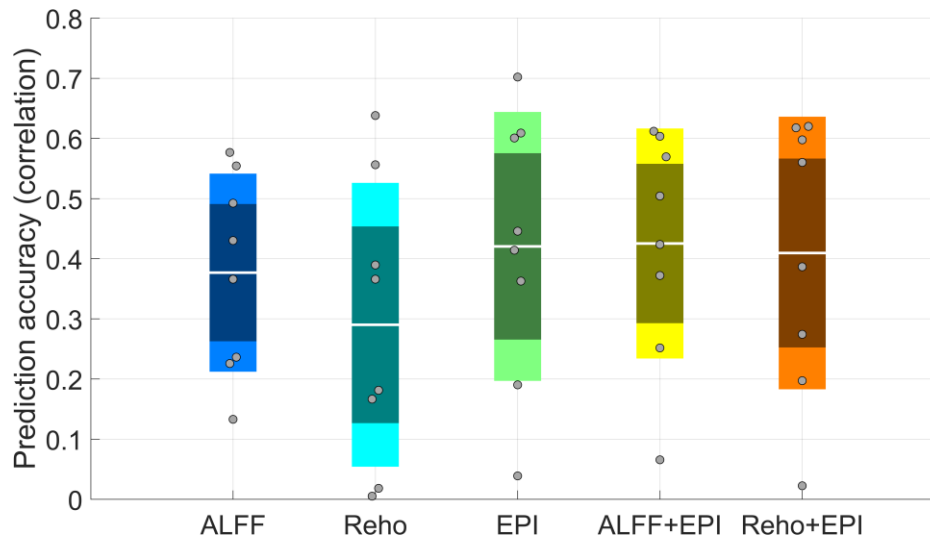
308 prediction accuracies slightly increased (Supplementary Figure S1). However, they were still smaller
309 than those using the raw EPI images.
310



311
312 **Figure 1** Prediction accuracies (correlations) of the amplitude of low-frequency fluctuations (ALFF)
313 maps, regional homogeneity (ReHo) maps, connectivity matrices, and raw echo-planar imaging (EPI)
314 maps on different environmental parameters. Each dot represents one subject's mean prediction accuracy.
315 The center white lines, inner dark bars, and outer light bars represent the mean, 95% confidence interval,
316 and standard deviation, respectively. The asterisks on the top represent statistical significance at $p < 0.05$
317 after false discovery rate (FDR) correction for all the 40 predictions.

318
319 It remains a question that whether the weather predictions using the resting-state parameters and
320 single EPI images are based on similar or different information. Since the daylight length had the highest
321 prediction accuracies, we focused on its prediction. We combined ALFF with EPI and ReHo with EPI to
322 predict daylight length to check whether combining the two modalities can boost the prediction accuracies.
323 Unfortunately, combining two modalities yielded very similar prediction accuracies as those using single
324 EPI images or ALFF images (Figure 2). Therefore, ALFF and ReHo did not convey more information
325 than a single EPI image to predict daylight length.

326



327

328

Figure 2 Prediction accuracies to daylight length using the amplitude of low-frequency fluctuations

329

(ALFF), regional homogeneity (ReHo), raw echo-planar imaging (EPI) maps, and their combinations.

330

Each dot represents one subject's mean prediction accuracy. The center white lines, inner dark bars, and

331

outer light bars represent the mean, 95% confidence interval, and standard deviation, respectively.

332

333

Next, we examined whether the global signal fluctuations of the resting-state data were correlated

334

with daylight lengths, and whether the global signal fluctuations contribute to the predictions of the

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environmental factors. The correlations between global mean ALFF and daylight lengths did not show a

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consistent pattern across subjects (Figure 3A). We also used the global mean scaled ALFF maps, i.e.

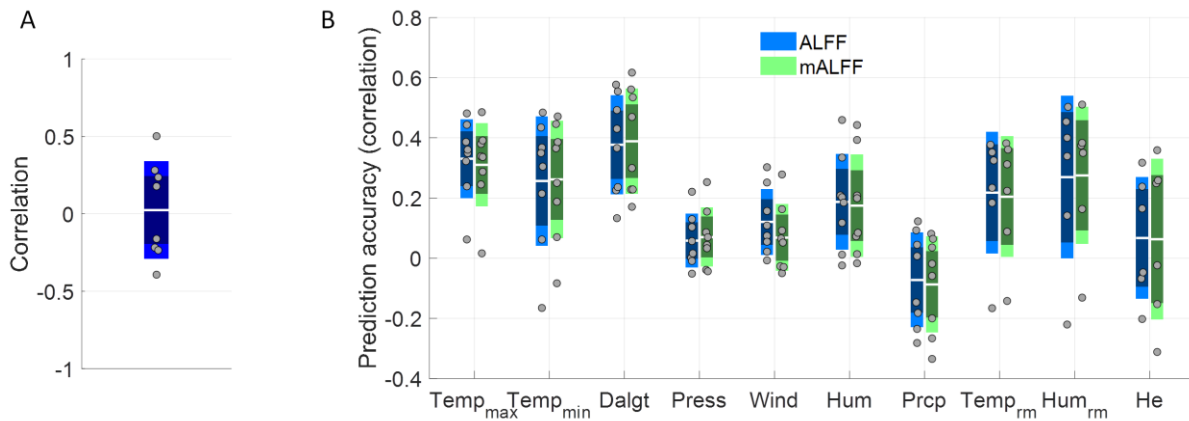
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mALFF, to predict different environmental variables, and they yielded similar prediction patterns as what

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using the raw ALFF maps (Figure 3B).

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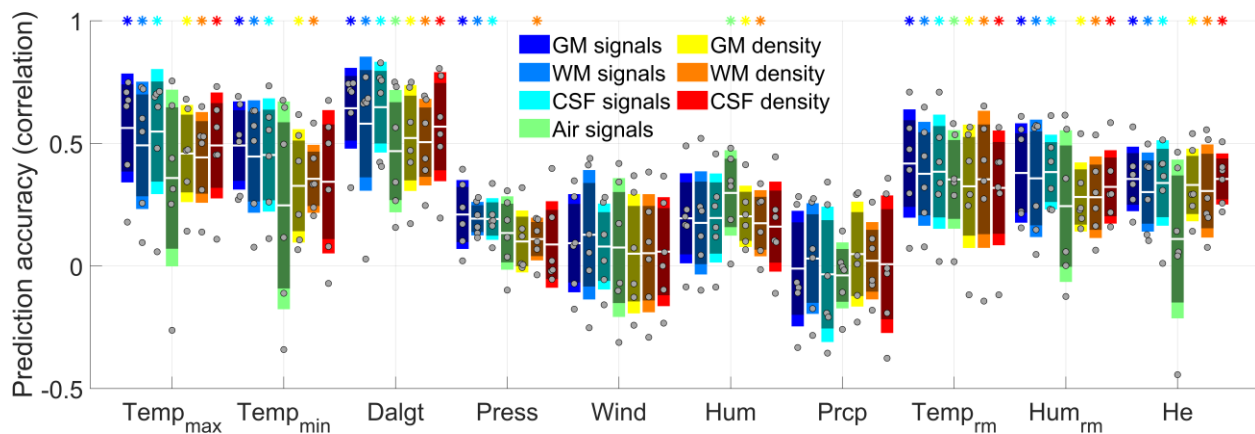
341 **Figure 3** A, correlations between the global amplitude of low-frequency fluctuations (ALFF) and
342 daylight lengths. B, prediction accuracies (correlations) of the environmental parameters using raw ALFF
343 and mean ALFF (mALFF). Each dot represents one subject's mean prediction accuracy. The center line,
344 inner dark bar, and outer light bar represent the mean, 95% confidence interval, and standard deviation,
345 respectively.

346

347 3.2. Predictions using the anatomical images

348 If a single volume of EPI image can predict weather parameters like daylight length, then the question
349 becomes whether the prediction is due to brain functional activity, structural information, or other factors.
350 We, therefore, performed similar prediction analyses using the anatomical images, which are available in
351 the six subjects in the Day2day dataset. We first performed predictions using the segmented GM, WM, or
352 CSF density images within their respective tissue masks (Figure 4). The results showed very similar
353 prediction patterns for different environmental parameters as what using the resting-state parameters.
354 That is, the daylight length and environmental temperatures had the highest prediction accuracies. The
355 prediction accuracies using all the three tissue probability maps were above 0.5, which were higher than
356 using any of the resting-state parameters. However, what was more interesting was that even higher
357 prediction accuracies could be achieved using the raw MRI signals in these tissue masks. The prediction
358 accuracies were higher than 0.6 when using raw MRI signals in the GM and CSF masks. Finally, we

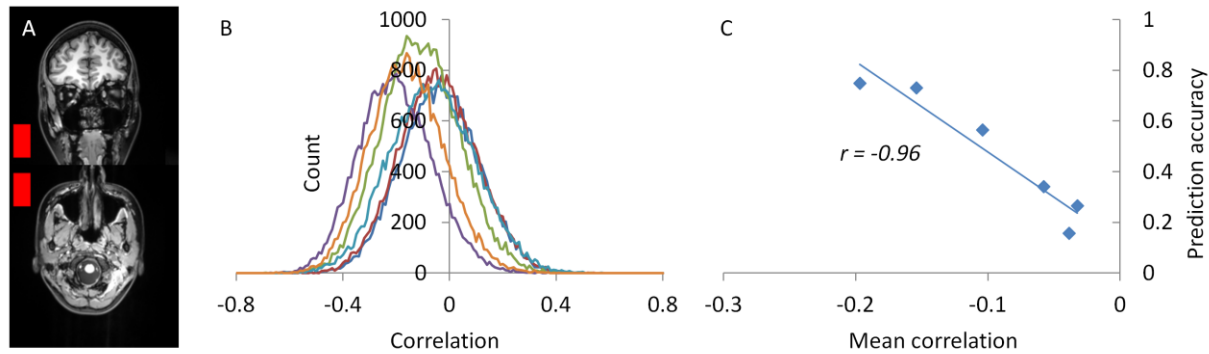
359 defined a cuboid mask outside the brain (see Figure 5A as an example), and used the raw MRI signals in
360 the mask to perform prediction analysis. Surprisingly, the analysis also showed a similar pattern of
361 prediction accuracies. The prediction accuracy on daylight length using the air mask was 0.47, which was
362 lower than using all the other anatomical parameters but still higher than using any of the resting-state
363 parameters.
364



365
366 **Figure 4** Prediction accuracies (correlations) of raw MRI signals and segmented densities in gray matter
367 (GM), white matter (WM), cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), and air masks on different environmental
368 parameters. Each dot represents one subject's mean prediction accuracy. The center white lines, inner
369 dark bars, and outer light bars represent the mean, 95% confidence interval, and standard deviation,
370 respectively. The asterisks on the top represent statistical significance at $p < 0.05$ after false discovery
371 rate (FDR) correction for all the 70 predictions.
372

373 To further explore the baseline MRI signals conveyed in the air mask, we calculated correlations
374 between the MRI signals and daylight length in all the voxels in the air mask for the six subjects (Figure
375 5B). There were small global effects of correlations between the MRI signals and daylight lengths.
376 Moreover, the global effects of correlations were strongly correlated with the prediction accuracies across
377 subjects (Figure 5C), indicating that the global correlation is the driving information that gave rise to the
378 prediction accuracy.

379



380

381 **Figure 5** A) An example of the air mask from one subject overlaid to the subject's anatomical image. B)

382 Histograms of the correlations between the MRI signals and daylight length of all the voxels in the air

383 mask. Each line represents one subject. C) There is an extremely high negative correlation between the

384 mean correlations in the air mask and the prediction accuracies of using the air mask voxels to predict

385 daylight length.

386

387 3.3. Control analysis using the phantom images

388 To further confirm the baseline signal changes, we analyzed the weekly quality control phantom data

389 around the same period of the Day2day project. We first calculated voxel-wise correlations between the

390 MRI signal and daylight lengths (Figure 6A). It clearly showed that in the phantom region, there were

391 high negative correlations. We defined a cubic mask in the center of the image, and the distribution of

392 correlations of all the voxels in the mask is plotted in Figure 6B. The mean and median correlation in the

393 cubic mask was -0.78 and -0.79 , respectively. We also performed similar predictions of the daylight

394 length by using the MRI signals in the mask, and the cross-validated mean accuracy was 0.70 . Lastly, we

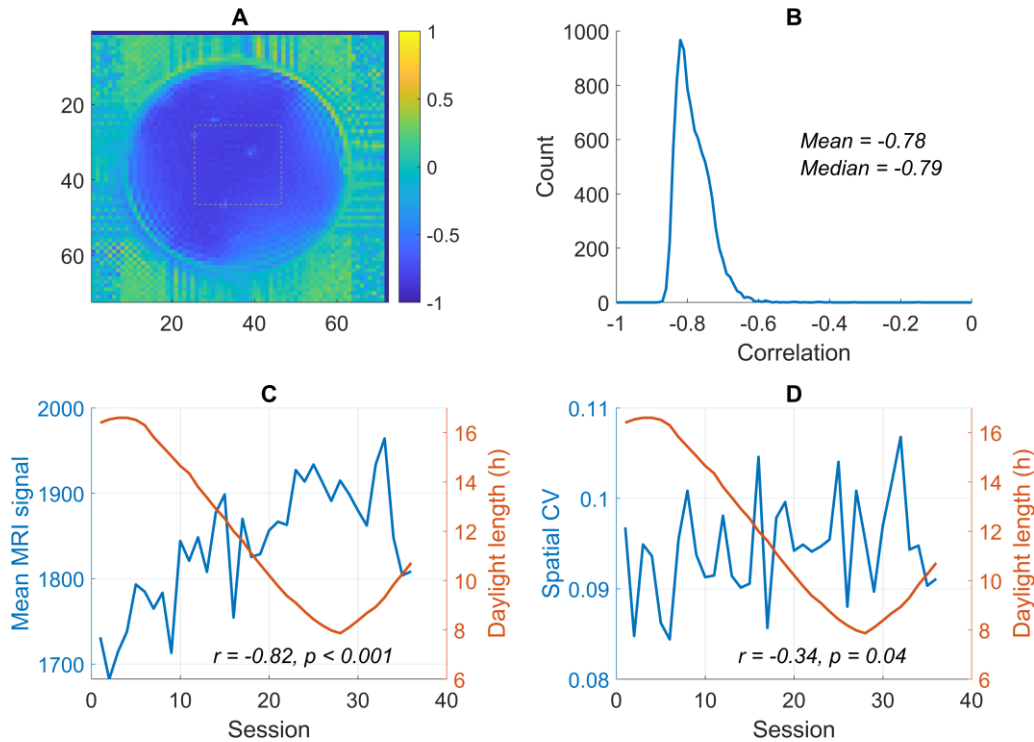
395 calculated the mean and spatial coefficient of variation of the MRI signals in the mask, and plotted them

396 against scan sessions (Figure 6C and 6D). The mean MRI signals showed a strong negative correlation

397 with daylight lengths ($r = -0.82$, $p < 0.001$). However, the spatial coefficient of variation showed only a

398 marginally significant correlation ($r = -0.34$, $p = 0.04$). The large negative correlation of daylight length

399 with the mean MRI signals and reduced correlation with the spatial coefficient of variation were also
400 confirmed by using the air mask signals of the MPRAGE images (Supplementary Figure S2).
401



402
403 **Figure 6** A) Voxel-wise correlation maps between MRI image values and daylight length. The dash-line
404 contour indicates the location of the cubic mask. B) Histogram of the voxel-wise correlations in the cubic
405 mask. C) and D) The averaged signals and spatial coefficient of variation (CV) in the cubic mask and the
406 daylight length against scan sessions.

407

408

409 4. Discussion

410 By applying machine learning regression to single-subject longitudinal fMRI data that were scanned over
411 months to years, we demonstrated that we can predict environmental parameters, especially daylight
412 length and air temperature, by using resting-state fMRI parameters. However, a series of controlled
413 analyses showed that using a single EPI image, the segmented tissue density, and the raw MRI signals

414 from the anatomical images in different tissue masks and even in a mask outside the brain could all
415 predict the environmental parameters. The resting-state parameters did not add prediction values to
416 single-volume EPI images. These results indicated the prediction of environmental parameters, especially
417 daylight length, cannot be explained as the weather effects on brain functions. Rather, the prediction may
418 reflect MRI scanner baseline signal variations that were affected by the environmental parameters. The
419 analysis of the quality control phantom images supported our speculation.

420 Among all the environmental parameters analyzed the daylight length and air temperature had the
421 highest prediction accuracies. It is not surprising because daylight length and air temperature are highly
422 correlated. Daylight length has the highest prediction accuracy probably because it is a physical quantity
423 that does not have measurement errors, which is in contrast to air temperature. It's noteworthy that
424 although the MRI scanner room temperature and humidity could not be predicted by the functional
425 parameters, they could be reliably predicted by the anatomical MRI parameters (Figure 4). However,
426 their prediction accuracies were smaller than those of daylight length and air temperature. It indicates
427 that the environmental effects on MRI signals are not directly caused by local temperature, but some other
428 local factors. A study has shown that the gaseous oxygen level in the magnet field can influence the MRI
429 signals (Bates et al., 1995). The oxygen level in the scanner room may fluctuate across seasons due to
430 different ventilation conditions, which may contribute to the MRI baseline signal shifts. In addition, the
431 cooling systems of the scanner may be affected by either electricity supply stability or cooling water
432 temperature. Given that the MRI is such a sophisticated machine, there may be other factors that mediate
433 the association between daylight length and scanner stability.

434 The current results highlighted the difficulty to study long-term effects such as weather on brain
435 structures and functions using MRI. Consistent with two previous fMRI studies (Choe et al., 2015;
436 Meyer et al., 2016), we did find weather effects on fMRI measures. But we demonstrated that the
437 weather effects are likely due to the variations of MRI scanner baseline. It is reasonable to speculate that
438 MRI scanner stability might contribute to the reported seasonal effects (Choe et al., 2015; Meyer et al.,

439 2016). We also showed that tissue probability measures of GM volumes may also be affected by the
440 scanner stability, so brain volumetric measures may also be affected by the scanner stability (Miller et al.,
441 2015). Careful examinations of the effects of MRI scanner baseline signals are needed to confirm these
442 reported findings.

443 In the current analysis, a few steps have been used to correct the MRI baseline signals. The fMRI
444 signals have been scaled by the grand mean of each session. And we also compared the prediction
445 accuracies of using ALFF and mALFF, which have yielded very few differences. The scaling may be
446 effective for local voxels. But due to the spatial heterogeneity, the baseline variability may still present in
447 some brain regions, which could be picked up by the machine learning algorithm. ReHo and connectivity
448 measures use correlation measures, which are insensitive or have scaled local signal variability. This may
449 explain why their prediction accuracies are smaller than ALFF. These problems may arise from the fact
450 that most of the fMRI measures are relative measures. If absolute measures can be used, e.g. blood
451 perfusion using arterial spin labeling (ASL) (Detre et al., 2012, 1992), then the effects from scanner
452 stability may be minimized.

453 The current analysis demonstrated that machine learning is a powerful method that can pick up
454 small effects. The phantom data showed the correlations between baseline MRI signals and daylight
455 length were about 0.7. When scanning human participants, the background MRI signals outside the brain
456 showed much smaller correlations with daylight length (Figure 5B and 5C). However, we could still
457 achieve a similar level as the prediction accuracies by using machine learning as the phantom data (Figure
458 4). Indeed, the cross-validated prediction accuracies were between 0.6 and 0.7, which are very close to
459 the correlation in the phantom data. Machine learning methods have become more and more popular in
460 studying brain-behavior relationships (Cui and Gong, 2018; Finn et al., 2015) and brain alterations in
461 mental disorders (Whelan et al., 2014). The current analysis illustrates that comparing performance with
462 chance level may not be sufficient to control for potential confounding variables. Careful choice of
463 control conditions is critical to make a proper conclusion. When performing machine learning analysis on

464 functional activations or connectivity data, the structural MRI data may be a good choice as a control
465 condition. The structural MRI data are usually available alongside the fMRI data, and don't reflect the
466 functional activity of the brain. Adding structural MRI as a control condition could rule out potential
467 structural variations as a source of individual differences, but could also rule out potential MRI baseline
468 variations as shown in the current analysis. A phantom scan may also be considered if long-term effects
469 are of interest.

470 The current study did not completely rule out the potential seasonal or daylight effects on brain
471 structures and functions. Studies using non-human animals have provided strong evidence of seasonal
472 and daylight effects on brain structural and functional variation in hippocampal volume (Nissilä et al.,
473 2012; Smulders et al., 1995; Tramontin and Brenowitz, 2000). PET studies of different neural
474 transmitters also provide evidence of seasonal effects (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Kaasinen et al., 2012;
475 Kalbitzer et al., 2010; Mc Mahon et al., 2016; Praschak-Rieder et al., 2008). Seasonal effects on brain
476 functions may still exist, but it is difficult to study by using MRI due to the factors identified in the
477 current analysis.

478 In conclusion, by applying machine learning on resting-state fMRI or structural MRI data, we
479 can predict several environmental parameters, with the highest prediction accuracies to daylight length.
480 However, the predictions were not likely due to the environmental effects on brain functions or structures,
481 but may be due to the baseline MRI signals. The data highlight the difficulty to use fMRI/MRI data to study
482 long-term effects, and call for cautions to control for scanner stability when studying long-term effects.

483

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