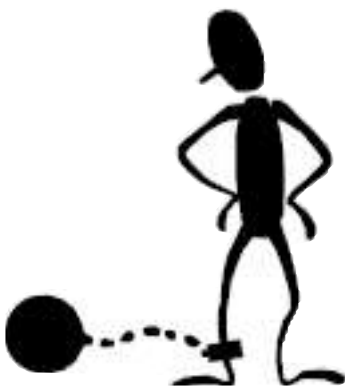


Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

One of the many illnesses caused by toxic chemicals



A lifetime sentence



Pamphlet by Wendy Standish

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Toxic chemicals are poisons

The initial cause of MCS may be just one acute exposure or many low-level exposures to a toxic chemical. Some examples of toxic chemicals are chemical solvents, volatile organic compounds, formaldehyde (the World Health Organization now calls formaldehyde a human carcinogen and it hides under many names even in our beauty aids such as shampoo and skin lotions). Formaldehyde is in, is released from, or is a product of the breakdown of the following: formalin, diazolidinyl urea, DMDM hydantoin, imidazolidinyl urea, quaternium 15, 2-bromo-2-nitropropane-1,3-diol, polyethylene glycol. When aspartame is heated, such as when products are stored in a warm place, it can break down into methanol and formaldehyde, both toxic. Toxic chemicals are capable of causing permanent damage to organs such as the brain, liver, spleen and pancreas, to name a few. Toxic chemicals can cause reproductive damage and cancer. A good book on the subject of choosing products is "The Safe Shopper's Bible" by David Steinman and Samuel S. Epstein. Once a person has MCS, extremely tiny amounts of toxic chemicals can cause reactions.



So how does a person with MCS cope?

It's not easy! It's like swimming against the current, when you're really, really tired. Our way of life has changed dramatically during the past century, and we are now a society that is very dependent upon chemicals, but most of the chemicals we use have been poorly studied, if at all, for their effects on human health, especially in combinations. Studies have shown that our bodies contain many toxic chemicals, which have been absorbed through our skin, or by breathing, or in our food. Total avoidance is impossible. A person with MCS can only decrease exposures, not eliminate them completely. That is why it is so important to avoid toxic chemicals whenever we can. We have many choices: make them wisely.

It's far easier to prevent MCS than to have to live with it.



What is multiple chemical sensitivity?



MCS is a chronic condition with symptoms in multiple organ systems, which happen in response to extremely low levels of toxic chemicals (poisons). A person with MCS often has allergies as well, although MCS itself is not an allergic condition. It is a reaction to many things in the environment, often involving digestive problems, respiratory difficulties, skin reactions, musculoskeletal problems and neurological difficulties. It may be a response to pesticides, air fresheners, cosmetics, perfumes, lotions, aftershave, deodorants, shampoo, hairspray, laundry products; building materials such as wood products, plastics, insulation, paints and varnishes; gas appliances, gasoline and diesel, cleaning products, medications, fabric finishes, foam in furnishings, plastics, drycleaning solvents, inks and papers in books, magazines, newspapers, photocopies, including this pamphlet. The list could go on and on.

MCS can have many symptoms



This is just a sampling of possible symptoms, and the diversity will give you some idea of why this illness is often missed as a diagnosis: joint pains, muscle aches, symptoms of fibromyalgia, tiredness, gastrointestinal distress, intestinal gas, diarrhea and/or constipation, abdominal swelling, asthma-like symptoms, bronchitis, drippy nose, eczema and other rashes, headaches, sleep disturbances, memory problems, problems with arithmetic, problems with logical thinking, a general "brain fog" feeling, forgetting words, "spaceyness", sense of unreality, difficulty concentrating, balance problems, a feeling of pressure in the head, emotional swings such as unexplained anger or crying when not sad or depressed, sleepiness, speech problems, voice problems, sinus problems, visual problems, heightened sense of smell, tingling or jumpiness of nerves in hands and feet, heart problems, seizures, fainting, temporary tunnel vision, problems focusing eyes.

MCS changes lives forever

Avoidance of toxic chemicals is the best way to prevent symptoms, and to prevent a worsening of the condition. Imagine a life in which you have to stay away from anyone using regular laundry and personal care products. Can you picture working, going to school or living in an environment which must not contain any chemicals to which you react? A teacher who can't be near books or photocopies? A nurse who can't be in a room in which strong cleaners have been used? Visiting a friend who has redecorated? Being near anyone who has used fabric softener?

So far, there is no cure. Avoidance is the best treatment.