

Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP)

FAST FACTS

What you should know about Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS):**What is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity?**

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is a term used to describe a condition some people develop after they have been exposed to sufficient amounts of certain chemicals. It is like having an allergy to those chemicals, because the body reacts the same way as it might when it is allergic to something. In people with MCS, their immune system recognizes the chemical(s) as an invader (like a bacteria or virus) and tries to get rid of it. Even though chemicals cannot be eliminated by the immune system like bacteria or viruses can, the immune system keeps trying and causes damage to the body instead. This is what causes the symptoms that people have.

One of the notable features of MCS is people will have bad reactions to chemicals at low levels where most others don't have any problem, or where the person didn't used to have a problem.

What are some of the symptoms of chemical sensitivity?

The variety of symptoms that people experience depends upon the type and intensity of chemical exposure. People who have become sensitized experience bad reactions to even small amounts of commonly used products. (See reverse side of this fact sheet.)

Common symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Chest tightness, shortness of breath or other breathing problems
- Muscle and joint pain and weakness
- Palpitations
- Increased sensitivity to odors
- Gastro-intestinal symptoms
- Nausea
- Depression
- Irritability
- Confusion

It is not normal to regularly experience these types of symptoms.

How do people become chemically sensitive?

People can become chemically sensitized after they have come into contact with certain chemicals, in sufficient amounts. Some of the chemicals suspected to cause chemical sensitivity include, but are not limited to:

- Diesel exhaust
- Pesticides
- Industrial solvents
- Formaldehyde
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs)
- Isocyanates

These and other potential sensitizing chemicals may be found in:

- Fragrances
- Hair care products
- Markers
- Copiers
- Glue
- Newspaper ink
- Nail polish/remover
- Dry-cleaned clothing
- Tobacco smoke
- Alcohol
- Caffeinated products
- Leather
- Anesthesia
- Latex
- Some cleaners
- Gasoline
- Off-gassing of office products, carpets and paint

What can I do if I think I have MCS?

Avoiding chemicals, foods and drugs that trigger symptoms is an important first step. Indoor air quality is also very important, since pollutants in confined spaces can be a source of many of the sensitizing agents.

Some physicians do not have experience with MCS patients. If you suspect that you suffer from MCS you may want to take this fact sheet or other related information with you when you see your doctor.

For more information, visit:

<http://allergies.about.com/od/medicationallergies/a/mcssyndrome.htm>

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