

May is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Awareness Month

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If you've never heard of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), you're not alone. I didn't know about it until I started developing symptoms myself. I now spend a good deal of time trying to raise awareness about MCS because it is a societal disease – meaning it is man-made – and if we created it, we also have the power to put an end to it.

MCS is a condition in which a person develops adverse symptoms from exposure to chemicals and fragrances in their environment. Although healthy people often react to toxic substances, the difference is that a person with MCS has much more serious, debilitating, and prolonged symptoms and also reacts to much smaller amounts of chemicals in the environment.

Some of the products that cause these reactions include perfume and cologne; fragranced laundry detergent, fabric softener, and dryer sheets; fragranced soap and shampoo; tobacco and wood smoke; new carpet, fresh paint, and other home renovations; air fresheners and cleaning products made with harsh detergents, solvents, or fragrances; etc.

MCS is increasingly prevalent in today's society because we continually choose to manufacture our products and conduct our industries using incredibly hazardous chemicals. We continually choose convenience and the dollar bill over people and health. MCS is caused by chronic exposure to these chemicals – there was no MCS before we began using them.

I could fill up this entire newspaper with examples of how MCS affects a person's life. Many people have to leave their jobs and let go of relationships with friends and family members who continue to use fragranced and chemical-based products. Getting their everyday needs met becomes a bigger chore than they ever thought possible. Many are forced into complete social isolation, poverty, and even homelessness. Sadly, there have been many deaths and suicides as well.

Many people do recover from MCS – there is a great deal of hope! – but it takes an incredible amount of time, research, money, and diligence to do so. People may spend years in the healthcare system before they even figure out what's going on and then many years after that attempting to treat the condition. Unfortunately, many people do not recover.

Possibly more than any other illness, you have the power to help people with MCS. Every person who stops using fragranced products is making a difference. Every organization that makes an effort to detoxify their workplace or make healthier products is making a difference. This is what it is going to take – one by one, people have to start caring enough to make changes in their lives. For many, these changes require very little effort yet are incredibly large in effect.

To learn more about MCS and how to go fragrance-free to protect your own health, please check out www.ThinkBeforeYouStink.com. Please browse this website with an open mind and remember that people's lives really are depending on the everyday product choices that the rest of the world makes. My hope is that you will compassionately consider the experiences of a more sensitive population and be inspired to think more deeply about your impact on the environment and the people around you.