Multiple Chemical Sensitivity
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Multiple chemical sensitivity, (MCS), is a serious and real condition that affects thousands of people. I call it a real condition because it has yet to be designated as a medical diagnosis. Thankfully, more research is being done to identify the causes of MCS and characterize the patients who report having symptoms. As more studies are published the conventional medical community will begin to accept that these patients have a real and often debilitating condition.

Multiple chemical sensitivity is intolerance to low levels of chemicals in our environment. People with MCS experience very negative sensations to chemicals that most people find pleasant, neutral or just mildly irritating. Symptoms often include headache, dizziness, nausea, musculoskeletal pain, poor memory and concentration, depression, anxiety, irritability and fatigue. Some often experience digestive disturbances and skin rashes. A patient with MCS often reports symptoms from simply smelling chemicals as well as from contact and ingestion. Chemicals are ubiquitous in our environment and many are considered environmental toxins. We are exposed to low levels on a daily basis in our food, water, air, cleaning products, cosmetics, grooming products and more. Patients with MCS often react negatively to their food, water, products, and the air making it almost impossible to lead a normal life.

So what causes MCS? Everyone in this country is exposed to some degree to toxic chemicals on a daily basis. So why doesn’t everyone have multiple chemical sensitivity. There are many theories but it is clear that these people are born with some type of predisposition to react to their environment. The newest area of research is genetic polymorphisms. The liver is the main organ that metabolizes the chemicals we inhale, ingest or come in contact with. The liver has numerous enzymatic pathways responsible for metabolism of chemicals. Genetic polymorphism is a mild alteration of one or more of these enzymes which impair the breakdown of toxins. People with MCS are unable to clear chemicals from the body properly so toxins accumulate disrupting the hormonal, neurological and immune system. (MCS is just one of many health conditions causes by exposure to low levels of chemical in the environment).

It is important for patients with MCS to seek out a doctor who has training in environmental medicine. Testing is available to check for levels of heavy metals, pesticides, solvents, phthalates, and other chemicals. Blood, urine, and adipose tissue studies are the most accurate for retention of accumulated toxins, not a hair analysis. Genetic polymorphism testing is also available.

Treatment is often difficult because people with MCS react to numerous drugs, foods, herbs, and supplements. Often patients with MCS don’t do well with chelation and detoxification programs, their symptoms get worse. If you have MCS and are seeking testing or treatment try to find a doctor trained in environmental medicine and who has adequate clinical experience in dealing with MCS.

It is possible to fully recover form multiple chemical sensitivity. It is possible to decrease symptoms and reactivity to the environment. Often it is a slow process and takes months or even years. But it is possible.