

Q & A

Shopping Without Leaving Home

“A good respirator is invaluable for a quick run into a store.”

Q: I have multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) since I was injured by solvents on the job. I struggle with grocery shopping because the stores often have fragrance pumped into the air system and the volatile organic compounds from routine cleaning and products being sold cause me to become so disabled that it becomes a medical emergency. How can I still get the things I need?

A: Shopping with MCS can be a difficult task. Besides the signature scents pumped into the air, the products being sold often create a problem. Most grocery stores apply pesticides and routinely wax the floors, two additional problems for people with MCS. There are a few options which may work.

A good respirator is invaluable for a quick run into a store. Wear long sleeves, long pants, closed shoes, a hat, and a respirator to protect yourself from both respiratory and skin contact exposure. Remember that fragrances and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) stick to your clothing, hair, and skin just like cigarette smoke does. Layering clothing so that the contaminated outer wear can be removed when you leave the store is also helpful. Shower as soon as you return home to remove any other contaminants.

If possible, have someone else do your shopping. This may involve a friend or family member who is willing to help for free or for a small fee for their time. Or it could be a shopping service or individual whom you hire. Many social service agencies have programs for seniors and the disabled that provide free shopping services. Shopping services for hire are also a possibility if the fee is affordable. If there are no services or the fees are too high, you might try running a help wanted add in your newspaper for a part time shopper.

There are various websites which ship directly to your door and sell everything from food, prescriptions, and clothing to furniture. The catch with these sellers is to find one with free or low cost shipping. The convenience of having everything come right to your door can't be beat. In addition, cross contamination of products with scent seems to be less common with items bought directly from a warehouse online.

Finally, some stores provide delivery service for a nominal fee. Check with the stores in your area. If they don't provide a delivery service, ask for accommodations. Request to call in an order so they can shop for you, charge your credit or debit card, and bring the cart outside to your vehicle.

