

Scientific Study

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Greatly Impacts Life and Function

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Often misunderstood as suffering from an annoying allergy, people with multiple chemical sensitivity actually struggle with disabling neurological symptoms when they are exposed to small amounts of perfume, fragrance, pesticides, and other common airborne chemical products tolerated by most.

Researchers have suggested that MCS is a chronic and disabling condition, unlike a mere annoyance from an allergy which most of us are able to understand more easily.

Skovbjerg and colleagues were interested in the details of the impact of MCS on everyday life in men and woman who have had MCS for at least one year.

Skovbjerg says, “MCS may severely influence different aspects of everyday life, including lifestyle, social relations, and occupational conditions.”

The most common coping strategy is to avoid common airborne chemicals and create a chemical-free living space. This involves a reduction of both work and social activities, not to mention daily tasks of living such as shopping.

The average experience with the healthcare system is rated poorly among people with MCS, largely due to physician’s lack of adequate training in toxicology and, thus, dismissal of the

symptoms by this population.

“If my doctor won’t even acknowledge my symptoms,” says one woman with MCS, “how can he treat them?”

Another woman says, “Since I’ve had MCS, I find that when I go to the doctor to get treatment, they always redirect the visit to something else they understand better that I didn’t come in for, like blood pressure or weight. It’s like they don’t know what to do for the MCS, so they ignore it instead of just saying they don’t know or referring me to a specialist who might know. It’s frustrating and dehumanizing. The doctor’s lack of knowledge affecting his psyche is not of my concern. He should be honest if he’s inexperienced in toxicology.”

Skovbjerg says further research is needed to add to professional understanding of MCS in order to provide more satisfactory healthcare. In the meantime, many with MCS are left to keep trying new doctors and fend for themselves while in a chronically disabled state.

Reference

Skovbjerg S, Brorson S, Rasmussen A, Johansen JD, Elberling J. Impact of self-reported multiple chemical sensitivity on everyday life: a qualitative study. *Scand J Public Health*. 2009 Aug;37(6):621-6. Epub 2009 May 1.