

*Scientific Study****MCS, Health, & Air Quality***

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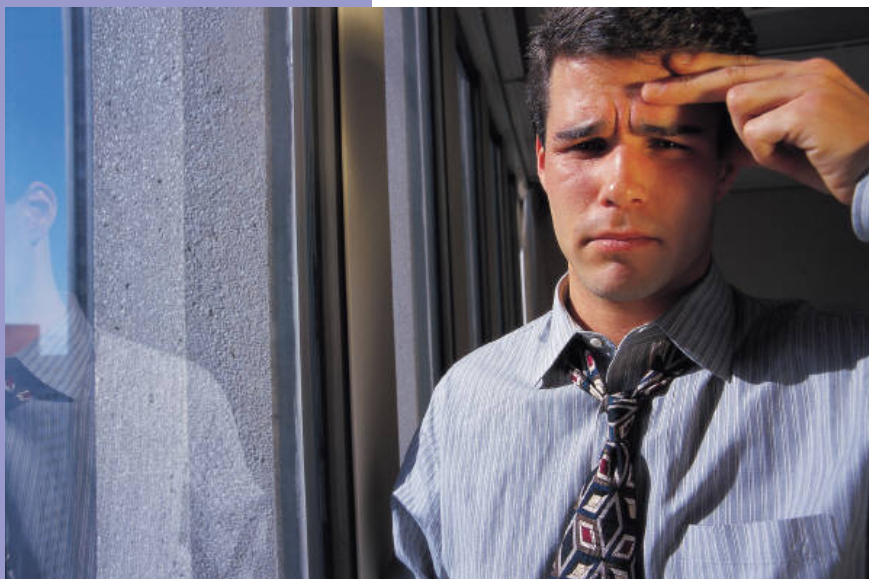
Regular reports are issued stating indoor environments, such as homes and offices, may affect human health. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) say the air in our homes and other buildings may be more polluted than the air outside. Poor air quality is implicated in asthma, allergies, fatigue, headaches, heart conditions, cancer, and other common ailments.

No one knows the effect of poor indoor air quality better than those most susceptible to it. After an initial chemical injury, individuals with multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) are less able to break down and eliminate pollutants they absorb from the environment. Exposure to pollutants and chemicals has a detrimental effect on physical and cognitive functioning in this popula-

tion. Therefore, they've become a good test population for the effects of poor indoor air quality.

According Trina Haney Davis, Leonard A. Jason, and Michael A. Banghart of DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, “Exposure to environmental chemicals precipitates MCS symptoms, one of the main treatments advocated is avoidance of these chemicals. Avoidance includes: consuming chemical-free food and water; wearing non-synthetic clothing free of pesticides and formaldehyde; living in housing with good ventilation, air purifiers, non-toxic paint, (without) carpeting, or synthetic furniture; and restriction of travel in areas where avoidance is impossible. If avoidance is achieved and MCS individuals live in safe housing, it is believed they are able to improve and return to a higher functioning level.”

In addition, avoidance involves the exclusive use of nontoxic cleaners free of fragrances and synthetic chemicals. Air fresheners, laundry soap, and fabric softener, for example, contain toxic chemical fragrances with ingredients on the EPA's hazardous substances list. These ingredients are not required to be listed on product labels. Therefore, unsuspecting consumers believe perfumes, lotions, shampoos, air fresheners, and cleaning products are made with benign substances.



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“Safe, affordable housing is the primary issue for people with MCS,” says Davis and her colleagues, who conducted a study of 289 individuals with MCS to determine the different health effects between groups living in safe housing and those in polluted housing.

Individuals with MCS living in safe housing were significantly less disabled than their counterparts with unsafe housing. Measures of disability include cognitive tests of learning and memory, visual spatial skills, attention and mental flexibility, psychomotor speed, manual dexterity, fatigue, and reports of adverse symptoms.

Those in safe housing had significantly higher levels of functioning, ability to engage in daily work and higher quality of life. In turn, the safe housing group was less stressed, higher income, and tended to be married rather than single.

When individuals who have MCS are exposed to chemicals, their work status and overall physi-

cal health is compromised, according to Davis.

There are a large number of people with MCS who do not have access to safe housing. Safe housing is not only more expensive, but is becoming more and more elusive as chemical products invade every nook and cranny of living space.

“Although this is a time when cutbacks are occurring for many social services, it does appear clear that those with MCS who do not have adequate housing are in need of resources and improved housing conditions,” asserts Davis.

Clearly, we are all in need of safe housing, lest more become chemically injured and develop MCS. But for people with MCS, their lives depend upon it.

Reference

Davis, TH, Jason, LA, Banghart, MA. The Effect of Housing on Individuals with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities. The Journal of Primary Prevention. 1998. 19(1).



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