



## COMMONLY ASKED Questions

**Q** What happens if a sufferer has a bad reaction?

**A** Depending on what the trigger is, a sufferer might need to open a window, switch on an air purifier or leave the room to get fresh air. Afterwards they are likely to be exhausted and need rest. Don't avoid visiting because you're worried about making the individual ill; just ask what preparations you need to make.

A separate leaflet is available for visiting sufferers with severe MCS  
Email: [info@MCS-AWARE.org](mailto:info@MCS-AWARE.org).

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The Charity for Environmental Illness

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**Q** Surely a little bit of perfume would help them get used to it?

**A** No. Reactions to chemicals occur regardless of whether they're noticed or have a scent. A healthy body can deal with most toxins absorbed through the skin, inhaled or digested, by converting the chemicals into harmless compounds and excreting them. This does not happen with MCS: chemicals get stuck halfway through the process and become even more toxic. This further damages the detoxification and immune systems and triggers a downward cycle where sensitivities increase and general health declines. Every chemical avoided is one less burden on the detoxification and immune systems and increases the likelihood of recovery.

**Q** Do Doctors recognise MCS?

**A** MCS affects hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, of all ages and backgrounds. MCS is classified as a physical illness by the World Health Organisation (WHO) under the International Classification of Diseases ICD-10-SGB-V, T78.4. MCS is recognised as a serious medical illness in Germany, Denmark, Austria, Luxembourg, Japan, Australia, Canada and the USA, where sufferers have access to appropriate medical treatment, housing and social support. In the UK multiple sensitivities are listed as a symptom of ME, but MCS is not yet recognised as an illness in its own right. Medical support varies widely and there are no specialist NHS treatment facilities. Sufferers and their families are often left to cope as best they can.

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# What is MCS?



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# WHAT IS Chemical Sensitivity?



People affected by Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) can't process toxins properly because their immune and detoxification systems are damaged. They have allergic-type reactions to synthetic and natural chemicals and fragrances.

## TRIGGERS

Sufferers can react to anything that's breathed in, eaten or absorbed through the skin. The most common triggers are volatile organic compounds (VOCs) like chemicals and fragrances in washing powder, toiletries, perfume, air fresheners, solvents, smoke, exhaust fumes, pesticides, decorating and cleaning products. People with MCS react to very low doses of substances at levels healthy individuals might not even notice. Some also react to food, moulds, electrical fields, mobile phones and WiFi.

## VISITING

Every chemical avoided is one less burden on the immune system and increases the likelihood of recovery. Visitors can help by reducing the amount of chemicals and fragrances they wear or bring into the house.

## SYMPTOMS

Reactions vary according to the type of chemical and how ill the sufferer is. They can include breathing difficulties, confusion, dizziness, exhaustion, shaking, skin rashes, headaches, palpitations or collapse. Some reactions are instant, others will occur hours or days later as the body tries to process the toxins.

## FRAGRANCE-FREE

Before visiting don't use perfume, aftershave, suncream, handcream or any other scented toiletries or hair products. Where possible avoid using them the day before too. If you're showering before the visit, either use fragrance-free products or plain water. Don't apply deodorant or moisturiser unless they are unscented.

## Happy to Change?

Unfragranced toiletries and laundry detergents are available in supermarkets and health-food shops. Ask sufferers which products they tolerate best or email [info@MCS-AWARE.org](mailto:info@MCS-AWARE.org).

## CLOTHES

Air clothes before visiting. Avoid wearing anything brand new, freshly washed or dry-cleaned. Make sure clothes don't smell of perfume or fabric conditioner. Avoid wearing new or recently polished shoes.

## HOW YOU Can Help

## ON THE WAY

If you are suffering from a cough or cold check it's still ok to visit.

On the way avoid air fresheners, petrol stations, smoking, cleaning products and scented soaps or handcream.



- To avoid a build-up of exhaust fumes, turn your car engine off as soon as you arrive.
- Sufferers might prefer not to shake hands, kiss or hug unless they know a visitor is fragrance-free.
- Fragrances can linger on furniture or in the air long after someone has left the room (think of cigarette smoke), so you might be asked to sit on a particular chair, or chat outside.
- During the visit sufferers might need to switch on an air purifier, wear a face mask or open a window.
- If someone is very ill they might provide you with a hat or coat to wear over your clothes. Handbags and plastic bags may need to be left outside and you might be asked to turn off your mobile phone or WiFi.