



COMMONLY ASKED Questions

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 not classified as a physical illness by the World Health Organisation (WHO). MCS is recognised in Germany, Denmark, Spain, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Japan, and several other countries, where sufferers sometimes 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.

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.



MCS-AWARE.org

The Charity for Environmental Illness

Email: info@MCS-AWARE.org

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Severe MCS



A Visitor's Guide

MCS-AWARE.org

The Charity for Environmental Illness
Registered charity: 1152139

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, plastic, rubber, 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. The leaflet 'How to be Fragrance-Free' details specific products- available from MCS-Aware.

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.

The recipe for fragrance-free Clothes

If you usually wear perfume or use fragranced laundry detergent or fabric conditioner you'll need this recipe for fragrance-free clothes!

Before visiting, discuss with the sufferer which would be best:

- Drop off an outfit in advance for the sufferer to wash through (include socks and underwear).
- Borrow clothes when you get there.
- Prepare your own clothes and take them with you (see below).



To Prepare Clothes

Choose clothes made from natural fibres like cotton, hemp or silk. Avoid non-organic wool and anything marked 'Easy-care' or 'Non-iron' as it will have been treated with formaldehyde which does not wash out. Soak everything in a strong, hot solution of bicarbonate of soda for a couple of hours.

Rinse, then soak in hot water with 3-4

tblsps distilled malt (clear) vinegar.

Repeat the soda / vinegar cycle twice more before rinsing several times, by hand in plenty of water.

Dry away from strong smells, including perfume, air fresheners and other clothes. It may be easier to start with brand new clothes



I do the same things before each visit, so why am I sometimes asked to shower again or change my clothes when I get there?

It's nothing to do with personal hygiene, it's simply to remove the chemical residues from washing powder and toiletries or fragrances that have been picked up on the way. Put simply, the body can only tolerate a certain amount of toxins each week. If a sufferer has already had several exposures in the last few days, is fighting off infection or is unusually tired or stressed, detoxification will be less efficient so symptoms will be worse and sufferers will react to things that don't normally affect them.

Sufferers know and greatly appreciate the effort you've made to prepare for the visit; they have to live like this all the time.

Longer VISITS

If you're visiting for more than an hour or the sufferer is particularly ill it can help to prepare your clothes before visiting. You will be able to stay for longer without causing a reaction and the sufferer will be more coherent and take less time to recover afterwards.

What to do

If you use environmentally-friendly or unscented laundry powder just rinse your clothes through a couple of times in water and air them well. Otherwise you could borrow some clothes from the sufferer and change when you get there, or prepare your own clothes-see opposite.

Swap your usual toiletries for unscented ones and prepare your clothes

On



- **Stop wearing perfume and aftershave 2 weeks before you go: fragrances can't be washed off, they wear off when your skin does!**
- If you've had any chemical hair treatments, e.g. perm or highlights wait a week or two before visiting.
- **Swap your usual shampoo and conditioner with fragrance-free ones a week beforehand. Ask the sufferer for advice or try Urtekam Fragrance Free range from healthfood shops or online eg Ocado.com or purenature24.com**
- The day before your visit avoid swimming in chlorine pools and don't eat garlic or strong spices (Depending on your metabolism, strong spices can still be sweated out 48 hours after eating them).

the day

Use fragrance-free toiletries. You might be asked to shower and change into your prepared clothes when you arrive rather than at home because as soon as you put on conventionally washed / perfumed clothes the fragrances and chemicals will rub back onto your skin, or you might pick up scents on the way. Ask the sufferer which is best for them. Read the tips for travelling on the previous page. Don't visit if you're suffering from a cold or infection.

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 healthfood shops. Ask sufferers which products they tolerate best or email info@MCS-AWARE.org

- 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.

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're suffering from a cough or cold don't visit until you're better.

Avoid air fresheners, petrol stations, smoking, cleaning products, scented soaps, handcream, coffee and strong mints/ menthol sweets.

