The Link Between Fibromyalgia and Chemical Sensitivity

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Dealing With Fibromyalgia Chemical Sensitivity

When you have fibromyalgia, you know you are going to be more sensitive to pain than the average person. In fact you will, in all likelihood, be more sensitive to a lot of things.

If you were to do an internet search of the words “fibromyalgia sensitive” the following options would be suggested:

- *Fibromyalgia sensitive skin to touch*
- *Fibromyalgia sensitivity to cold*
- *Fibromyalgia sensitivity to light*
- *Fibromyalgia sensitivity to noise*
- *Fibromyalgia sensitivity to medications*
- *Fibromyalgia sensitivity hot and cold*

Seems like it would be fair to say we are a sensitive group. The exact causes of most of these sensitivities are unknown. Feasibly though, this may have something to do with our heightened nerve endings or possibly due to generalized hypervigilance.

Some of us may experience yet another type of sensitivity: sensitivity to chemicals. I personally have noticed an increasing inability to tolerate chemicals over the last several years. It is believed that about 16 percent of people with fibromyalgia also have multiple chemical sensitivity syndrome (MCS).

What Is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Syndrome?

This disorder causes reactions to multiple chemical substances and differs from an allergic reaction. While the reaction may be similar to that of an allergy, MCS is considered an idiopathic disorder, meaning it is not understood what causes it.

Some of the possible symptoms of MCS include:

- Burning, stinging eyes
- Wheezing, breathlessness
- Extreme fatigue
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Poor memory and concentration
- Runny nose
- Sore or burning throat
- Cough

- Earache, ringing in the ears
- Skin rashes and/or itching
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Sleeping problems
- Digestive upset
- Muscle and joint pain

What Can Cause These Reactions?

Unfortunately, there are a lot of things that may affect someone with MCS — the world around us is filled with chemicals. Everyone is affected differently and may have different triggers.

I first noticed an intolerance to cleaning products. As the years have gone on, I have had to make adjustments in what laundry detergent I use, as well as lotions, body and face wash, and deodorant.

I had to stop wearing perfume, and rid my home of air fresheners and fabric softeners. I also have found that it is imperative for me to avoid cigarette smoke, certain types of paint and insecticide.

What Can You Do to Protect Yourself?

The best protection is avoidance. The best possible thing you can do for yourself is to make your own home a safe haven from chemicals. Then try to limit your exposure outside of the home as much as you reasonably can.

Getting rid of or replacing all of your triggers can seem overwhelming at first. The good news is there are a lot of natural options on the market now. If you are unable to find what you need in a store near you, you can find just about anything you need online.

Better yet, there are many products you can make yourself, easily and inexpensively. I have found many helpful articles online for how to make cleaners using ingredients like vinegar and baking soda. There are also many beauty and personal care products that can be made with things like coconut oil and apple cider vinegar.

Obviously avoiding chemicals at home is considerably easier than when you are at work, shopping, or among friends and family.

You may consider talking to your employer and co-workers. Tactfully explain how you are affected and what specifically bothers you, whether it be the cleaners used, or the perfume and cologne worn by others in the office. The same can be done with family and friends.

While shopping, try to avoid the aisles with cleaning products or other triggers as much as possible. If you see someone smoking, avoid walking near them.

While it is true MCS is not likely to cause any permanent harm, it can however severely limit your ability to function and care for yourself, your family, or perform necessary duties at work. Therefore it should be taken seriously by you and by others in your life.

Important Reminders

When dealing with MCS, it is vital to remember avoidance is the most important thing. If you are exposed to one of your triggers try to remove yourself as quickly as you can. Frequently getting fresh air can help to lessen the symptoms.

When you are suffering with fibromyalgia, the last thing you need is to deal with any added pain or discomfort caused by MCS. With a little diligence and the support of others around you, you can lessen the effect of this frustrating disorder.