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## MCS: Strategies for Individuals

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There are several strategies that can be adopted so that you can return to normal health as soon as possible if you have MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity).

- Strategy 1: Choose the appropriate type of housing (see ExEx14099, Types of Housing).
- Strategy 2: Take medication to desensitize (see your doctor or allergist).
- Strategy 3: Use nutritional supplements.
- Strategy 4: Create a safe, healthy environment in which to live.
- Strategy 5: Create an oasis (a totally chemically free area) within the home.
- Strategy 6: Avoid certain places, materials, and products.
- Strategy 7: Use natural products and elements.
- Strategy 8: Maintain a clean environment.
- Strategy 9: Determine your food allergies.

**Strategy 1: Choose the appropriate type of housing.**  
Information was provided in ExEx14099, Types of Housing.

**Strategy 2: Take medication to desensitize.**  
Some individuals with MCS take medication daily. This medication will desensitize the body to allergies, allowing the MCS person to encounter some chemicals throughout the day without becoming ill. For more information, consult your doctor or an allergist.

**Strategy 3: Use nutritional supplements.**  
Some individuals with MCS have found nutritional sup-

plements beneficial. Your physician can determine the appropriate nutritional supplements.

**Strategy 4: Create a safe, healthy environment in which to live.**

Strategies to create a safe, healthy environment were provided in Extension Extras 14096, 14097, 14098, and 14099. The following provides further detail.

Often individuals with MCS have no choice but to stay in their existing homes or apartments. For that reason, creating a safe, healthy environment is extremely important. This type of environment must be relatively free of chemicals, and several steps can be taken to create a chemically free environment in an existing space.

1. Smoking must not be allowed within the home. If smoking has been allowed in the past, some materials may need to be removed that have absorbed tobacco odors such as carpet, other textiles, and possibly wall-board.
2. If possible, the carpet should be removed and replaced with a hard surface (tile, stone, wood) or resilient (linoleum). If it cannot be removed, the following steps may be taken to eliminate odors from carpet: 1) scatter baking soda over the carpet, 2) allow the baking soda to set from 2 to 6 hours, and then, 3) thoroughly vacuum.
3. Newer products that contain chemicals need to be removed. Or eliminate odors from newer products by airing out-of-doors (and let fresh outside air also enter your home).

4. If there is a wood-burning stove in your home, remove or tightly seal.
5. Remove or limit the number of accessories that collect dust particles and are difficult to wash.

If it is possible to build or purchase a new home, it should be built using materials and products that are free of chemicals:

1. All materials (floor and wall coverings, furniture, cabinetry, bedding, etc.) purchased for the home must be free of chemicals.
2. Once the home is occupied, maintaining a continuously clean environment is essential. Vacuum daily. Create a space that is easy to clean. For example, select a washable floor covering such as tile, and for aesthetics and comfort, use washable area rugs.
3. Accessories add to the aesthetics within the home, but they should be minimal and easy to wash.

**Strategy 5: Create an oasis** (a totally chemically free room) within the home.

For individuals with MCS, a room within the home must be totally free of chemicals. This space is called an “oasis.”

Frequently the oasis is a bedroom, which is an ideal place because it can easily be isolated from other areas of the home. A list of ways to create an oasis can be found in ExEx 14096, Indoor air quality and multiple chemical sensitivity. The following provides further detail regarding these suggestions.

1. Floor covering: hard surface materials (tile or wood) are ideal because they will not absorb odors as easily as soft floor covering such as carpeting.
2. Resilient floor covering (vinyl and linoleum) are two choices. Linoleum is the best choice as it is made from natural products and will not affect indoor air quality.
3. Area rugs made from organic natural fibers will add warmth and increase aesthetics.
4. Wall covering such as low voc paint or paper that is untreated may be selected.
5. Organic natural fibers are the best choice for textiles. These types of fibers do not contain chemicals that are often added or applied to most fibers during production or in the manufacturing process.
6. Seal all heat ducts with foil or an airtight material that contains no chemicals. This will eliminate dust particles in the air.
7. The best choice in window treatment is a hard treatment that can be washed, such as metal horizontal

blinds. To soften the look, use a simple valance made from a washable, organic natural fiber.

8. The mattress and all bedding must be made from organic natural fibers with no chemical treatments and be completely washable.
9. If bedroom accessories are used, only products that will not collect particles of dust and that are washable should be used.
10. An air filter machine will continuously filter the air.

**Strategy 6: Avoid certain places, materials, and products.**

Another strategy is avoidance.

1. Avoid spaces, stores, and homes that are newly built, remodeled, or decorated. In these types of spaces, odors from chemicals are stronger and more potent during the first year of product life.
2. Stores during the seasonal change of merchandise, because new materials emit the greatest concentration of gasses.
3. Leather stores, as leather products may have an offensive odor.
4. Dry cleanable materials, because some cleaning solutions contain chemical solvents.
5. Avoid sitting or standing near someone who is wearing perfume. Require a fragrance-free policy in the home and in the work place. Perfumes negatively affect the indoor air quality and may cause health problems for individuals with MCS.
6. During the spring and fall as well as during a damp summer, some individuals with MCS must be alert to the pollens in the air and avoid moist areas.
7. Moist or damp spaces. Mold and mildew in such spaces may negatively affect the indoor air quality and cause health problems for individuals with MCS.
8. Other information is provided in ExEx 14097 and 14098, Materials to avoid and Interior finishes.

**Strategy 7: Use natural products and elements.**

Natural products must replace all those that contain chemicals, such as cleaning products for furniture and clothing, cosmetics, fabrics.

1. Cleaning products for furniture, windows, floors, sinks, and bathroom fixtures may contain chemicals, and many contain some form of formaldehyde or phenol. Recommended cleaning products are water and non-perfumed chemical-free soap or vinegar and water solutions.
2. Many cosmetics contain fragrances, but some are fragrance-free. To avoid cosmetics with chemicals that irritate and create allergic reactions, fragrance-free products are recommended.

3. Nutritional supplements may be synthetic, natural, or natural and organic. Synthetic supplements are not a healthy choice. Natural supplements may or may not be, depending upon how the product is grown. On the other hand, supplements that are natural and organic are a healthy choice.
4. Live plants add to the aesthetics and natural feel to a space, and they may also reduce contaminants in the air. However, plants will not substantially reduce or remove air pollutants (formaldehyde, etc.). However, if not properly handled, plants may add contaminants such as mold and/or mildew to the interior. If plants are used, choose types that need less water. This will decrease the possibility of mold and mildew as well as insect infestation and plant disease. Also, to avoid adding chemicals to the interior, choose plants that require a minimal amount of fertilizer (Bower 2000, *Creating a healthy household*).

**Strategy 8: Maintain a clean environment.**

A clean environment is important to an individual whose chemical sensitivities include allergies to dust, mold, and mildew. To limit the dust, dusting two times a day to keep dust particles at a minimum is recommended. Dehumidifiers are also recommended to eliminate moisture and the development of mold and mildew.

**Strategy 9: Determine food allergies.**

Some food allergies are related to microbial pollutants such as mold in food. For example, yeast is a mold. The solution to food allergies is to consume only natural products and not to consume products with yeast, wheat, sugar, vinegar, dairy products, and some herbs. By producing homegrown vegetables and herbs, many of these problems are avoided. But others problems are more challenging, such as the allergy to wheat, the main ingredient in breads, pastas, and many other products. Consult with a physician regarding food allergies.

**Summary**

Many individuals with MCS have learned to cope with their illness by using various strategies. With the use of medication and avoidance, some chemicals are tolerated within the public-built environment.

Over time, many individuals with MCS return to a more “normal” lifestyle. They are able to work and shop, but they will avoid new or remodeled stores, leather stores, and stores during seasonal changes. It is, however, their home and the oasis within their home that is the most important part of their tolerance.

Once individuals are able to tolerate environments outside the home and able to return to the workplace, the workplace should also be free of chemicals. If this is impossible, an oasis or the area in which the individual works must be free of chemicals.

Safe, healthy environments are important for individuals with MCS but also for all occupants of the space. Beyond MCS, there are other health conditions such as asthma, allergies, or birth defects that can be traced to poor IAQ (Bower 2001; EPA 1994). For example, research has indicated that exposure to mold or mildew growth, tobacco smoke, and other indoor particles can cause an asthmatic attack. According to Bower (2001), “there were 4,580 asthma-related deaths in the United States in 1980.” So, it is important create safe, healthy environments for everyone.

**References**

Bower, J. 2001. *The healthy house: How to buy one, how to build one, how to cure a sick one* (4th ed). New York: Healthy House Institute.

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