

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) & Indoor Air Quality

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), once widely regarded with skepticism, is a growing health concern for many Americans. The October 2006 issue of National Geographic magazine features an in-depth article about the chemical pollution within our bodies and the increasing prevalence of MCS.

Most of the problematic chemicals did not exist until after World War II, when petrochemicals (petroleum-based chemicals) were synthesized. Many pesticides, synthetic fragrances, cleaning products, and detergents are made from toxic petrochemicals. These chemicals can be found all around us, especially inside the tightly sealed walls of homes, offices, and automobiles.

Formaldehyde and other toxic volatile organic compounds (VOCs) enter the air from carpet, plastic, insulation, adhesives, and other building materials. Other dangerous chemicals include: pesticides in bug sprays, lawn chemicals, and household cleaners; nitrogen dioxide in unvented gas stoves or heaters and carbon monoxide gas appliances; solvents from household cleaners, paint strippers, and gasoline; dyes from clothing and other materials; and latex from paints, gloves, and caulking. These chemicals may cause sore throats, headaches, digestive problems, nervous system problems, respiratory problems, various allergic reactions, and even cancer in some cases.

The right air purifier will remove these dangerous chemicals from the air in your home; however, the wrong air purifier will only make the air quality worse. If you suffer from MCS, you should avoid ozone generators and ionic air cleaners. Not only do these machines generate ozone, which is a powerful lung irritant, but the ozone can combine with ordinary household fumes to create formaldehyde, carbonyls, and other reactive, unstable, and carcinogenic compounds.

"You start with a biologically innocent compound, and you expose it to ozone, and you get a carcinogen," explains Professor William Nazaroff of the University of California, Berkeley. "There's a lot of downside risk from reactive chemistry, as our investigations have begun to explore."

Not all air purifiers emit dangerous chemicals. Founded by a man whose wife developed MCS, AllerAir Industries specializes in correcting the problem of airborne chemical pollution. AllerAir air purifiers contain pounds of activated carbon to adsorb chemicals.

The AllerAir MCS Series Air Purifiers include special features to handle even the smallest traces of chemical vapors. Additionally, they are manufactured with inert materials to ensure that the air purifier itself does not off-gas VOCs or other harmful chemicals. Even the pre-filter is made with unbleached, pesticide-free 100% cotton!

AllerAir has perfected the art of creating special carbon blends to address different chemical pollution problems. The AllerAir 5000 DS Air Purifier adsorbs tobacco smoke, tar, fine ash, and other airborne particulates; its specially blended carbon traps up to 400 toxic chemicals found in tobacco smoke. AllerAir VOCARB air purifiers specialize in the removal of VOCs and other gases and chemicals, while the AllerAir 6000 D Air Purifier and the AllerAir 6000 DX Air Purifier contain 28 and 36 pounds of activated carbon, respectively, for heavy-duty chemical, gas, and odor removal.

Other effective, unique air cleaners for unique chemical pollution problems include the GC and GCX series air purifiers by IQAir. The IQAir GC AM air purifier specializes in absorbing ammonia, a chemical found in many cleaning products which can cause difficulty breathing. The IQAir GC Chemisorber air purifier rids the air of many dangerous chemicals including hydrogen sulfite, nitric acid, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide, and formaldehyde. You may not even know that these chemicals are present in the air, but after prolonged exposure, they can cause respiratory disorders and other illnesses. The IQAir GC Multigas air purifier specializes in the removal of chemical fumes and tobacco smoke. Tobacco smoke is one of the most harmful and longest-lingering types of smoke, and it's no surprise that many people are allergic to it. The IQAir GC VOC air purifier specializes in the removal of VOCs.

Constructed of solid steel (so the housing will never off-gas chemicals), Austin Air Healthmate Superblend Air Purifiers contain strategically placed impregnated carbon/zeolite filters for removal of VOCs, formaldehyde, ammonia, other chemical fumes, and odors. Blueair air purifiers with a SmokeStop Filter also use activated carbon to trap smoke, odors, and chemicals.

Many people experience reactions to VOCs and other chemical fumes inside automobiles (especially new automobiles). The Amaircare Roomaid Portable HEPA Air Purifier with an optional auto adapter kit filters out allergens such as dust, smoke, pollen, animal dander, and mold, as well as VOCs, auto exhaust, and other noxious fumes and odors. The compact, portable Blueair AirPod air purifier also provides clean air on-the-go.

Unfortunately, if you have chemical sensitivities, you can't always carry an air purifier with you, even if it is small and portable. But you can always carry a mask with you, and most people with extreme chemical sensitivities do just that. During her bout with MCS, Dr. Gloria Gilbere always carried an I Can Breathe mask. Dr. Gilbere says, "I use and recommend I Can Breathe masks because I found they are the least reactive for highly sensitive

individuals as well as because of the protection of a disposable filter and the light weight. So many masks I tried were so thick and heavy that I felt like I was suffocating. Fortunately, I don't have to wear one anymore, but I don't leave home without one in my car, briefcase or handbag."

Our modern world is becoming increasingly toxic, and in order to live long, healthy lives, we must start paying closer attention to the pollutants that we inhale everyday. As David Ewing Duncan writes in the National Geographic article, "Thanks to modern chemistry, eggs don't stick to the pan, underarms are fresh all day, SUVs hit 60 in six seconds. But such convenience has a price: Chemicals that suffuse modern life - from well-known toxins to newer compounds with unknown effects - are building up in our bodies and sometimes staying there for years."

About the Author

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