

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity – November 2003

How Catherine copes with MCS

Few conditions can surpass MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity) in its complexity, but it is one that an increasing number of M.E. sufferers are facing. However, the situation doesn't have to be bleak! Life *can* get better, and in some M.E. sufferers, addressing food and chemical sensitivities can mean the difference between success and failure.

MCS management is basically a case of damage limitation, but your efforts can and do pay off, as I can testify! I myself follow a strict diet - as organic as I can make it - incorporating meat, poultry, vegetables and unusual foods like sweet potato or nut squash, and almond or cashew butters.

I use bottled water for drinking, cooking and even washing vegetables, as I am severely affected by tap water, but water filters can be used successfully by some people, which are available from sources such as the Healthy House (see below). Brita jug filters may be sufficient for the less severely affected, which are available from Sainsbury's, or health stores.

The Healthy House sells organic cotton bedding, vacuum cleaners with special filters in order to minimise dust mites, and various other items that can make a big difference to MCS sufferers, many of who are allergic to dust mites, pollens and moulds.

As far as clothing is concerned, I wear only cotton or ramie, as synthetic fabrics are a 'no-go' area. I soak them in a solution of water and one tablespoon of Sodium Bicarbonate, then wash them, before I wear any new clothing (unless they are made from organically grown cotton) in order to neutralise the chemical finishes. It sounds eccentric, but take it from me, it works! So does the equally eccentric habit of hanging glossy magazines on the line, in order to 'de-pong' them! My neighbours are so used to such a sight that they no longer pass comment! (Ed – this gives a whole new meaning to putting documents on line!)

I also have a couple of air filters which I find useful if the neighbours have bonfires or barbecues which have a tendency to pervade the whole house. I am also helped greatly by neutralising vaccines from a clinic that specialises in MCS, which help to bring my food & chemical sensitivities under a reasonable amount of control. Avoidance of the worst triggers, in so far as is possible in today's world, is still the best strategy. Having neutralising vaccines to various foods and chemicals doesn't necessarily mean you can expose yourself to them indiscriminately!

Reading up on MCS has helped me greatly as far as understanding and managing my condition goes (just remember to 'air out' the books in a spare room first!) and the support of other MCS 'survivors' is an absolute godsend

too. We all speak the same language, and have a camaraderie between us that can't be beaten!

Don't forget to use 'safe' cleaning products (e.g. - the Bio D or Boots range, and the old standbys like Bi Carb and Soda Crystals too!) and also 'safe' toiletries (e.g. - Simple, Boots), if you want to minimise the chemical load. This is also important for healthy people – such as those you happen to live with! Their support is crucial if you are to be successful in your attempts to bring your condition under control.

I can't pretend that living with MCS is easy. It isn't. It's no battle for the faint hearted, and I can't pretend that I've got it down to a fine art by any means! I've paid dearly for many indiscretions, and made many big and expensive mistakes. However I can still find happiness in many aspects of my life - in my family, friends, music, reading, and writing – within MCS's restriction. Something good can come out of something bad, so hang on in there...! Good luck to all of you with your battle against MCS - you are definitely *not* alone!

Allergy free goods - Sources

Healthy House – tel 01453 752216

Organic Cotton Clothing/Bedding, air & water filters, books, supplements, various 'safe' products for the chemically sensitive

Ecozone - tel 0208 6620 7200

Shower filters, cotton clothing, environmentally 'safe' cleaning products, toiletries etc.

Greenfibres - tel 01803 868001

Organic cotton clothing & bedding

Organic foods/Special foods

Beanies Wholefoods Sheffield 2681662

Goodness Direct 0871 8716611

Simply Organic 0871 1000 444

Allergy Free Direct 01865 722003

Most health food stores stock 'free from' products -see Yellow pages/Thomson Guides Sainsbury's. Some Branches of Sainsbury's, M&S, Waitrose, Tesco, Asda & Safeways stock organic and 'special' foods for allergy sufferers.

Books

Multiple chemical sensitivity - Pamela Reed Gibson

£12.99 Airlift Book Co 0208 804 0400 or from The Healthy House (See above)

The Allergy Survival Guide - Jane Houlton (Vermillion, 1993)

The EI Syndrome - Dr Sherry A Rogers (Presige Publishing, USA)
(EI = *environmental illness*)

Tired or Toxic - Dr Sherry A Rogers (Presige Publishing, USA)

The Allergy Bible - Linda Gamlin (Quadrille)

Allergy Free Living - Dr Peter Howarth & Anita Reid (Mitchell Beazley)

The Detox Diet – Dr Paula Baillie Hamilton (Michael Joseph 2002)

Allergy Solutions – Suzannah Olivier (Pocket Books)

Allergy Free Food – Tanya Wright (Hamlyn)

The Daily Telegraph's Complete Guide to Allergies – Pamela Brooks
(constable Robinson)

Complete Guide to Food Allergy and Tolerance – Professor Jonathan Brostoff and Linda Gamlin

Action Against Allergy Bookshop

P.O. Box 279

Twickenham

Middlesex TW1 4XQ

Suppliers

Healthy House

The Old Co-Op

Lower Street

Ruscombe

Stroud GL6 6BU

Ecozone

Unit 1

Tannery Close

Beckenham

Kent BR3 4BY

Greenfibres

99 High Street

Totnes

Devon TQ9 5PF

Safe Cosmetics

Blackmore 0208 842 3956

Green People 01444 401 444

Weleda 0115 944 8222

'Simple' and Boots products

'Crimpers' pure shampoo – available from Breakspear Hospital for

Environmental Medicine 01442 261 333

MCS Specialist Hospital

Breakspear Hospital for Allergy and Environmental Medicine
Hertfordshire House
Wood Lane
Paradise Estate
Hemel Hempstead HP2 4FD
Tel 01442 261 333

Allergy Organisations

Action Against Allergy
PO Box 278
Twickenham TW1 4QQ
Tel 0208 892 2711

Allergy UK
Deepdene House
30 Bellegrove Rd
Welling DA16 3PY
Tel 0208 303 8528
(now runs a helpline)

Catherine also recommends

The 'What Doctors Don't Tell You Candida & M.E. Guide' (has a chapter about MCS)

And

The Allergy Handbook by What Doctors Don't Tell You. They also have books relating to mercury fillings and various other health issues.

What Doctors Don't Tell You

Satellite House
2 Salisbury Road
London SW19 4EZ
Tel 0870 444 9886
(www.wddty.co.uk)