

Living with multiple chemical sensitivities – a picture tour



People living with severe MCS have developed many coping methods. We show some of them in this picture tour.

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An essential part of managing chemical sensitivities is to reduce the chemical exposures that cause symptoms. For people who have the milder version of the illness that could just mean changing a few products, such as the laundry detergent and stop using pesticides. For those who have the more severe versions, called MCS, the changes can be much more involved.

The products that cause symptoms vary with the person. Fragrances are one of the most common triggers, but even among those with severe MCS there are a few who do tolerate them.

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In a few cases the illness becomes so severe they have to move away from the polluted city. Some move to areas where other people with MCS have settled, as that allows them to have a social life without having to constantly dodge the toxic personal care products almost all people use. The picture above shows a Thanksgiving party in an MCS community in Arizona — a whole house full of fragrance-free people!

Some of the precautions that people with MCS have practiced for many decades have become more mainstream, such as organic food, bottled/filtered water and air purifiers. The Covid-19 pandemic introduced social distancing, which people with MCS have practiced all along to avoid other people's fragrances and laundry chemicals.

In the following we show some examples of what people with severe MCS commonly do to manage their disability. It is not a complete list and not everyone does all these things.



One of the most important measures is to create a non-toxic bedroom. This example has tiled floors, sealed walls, all-cotton bedding, a custom-built bed, and hardly anything else in the room.



Gasoline is very toxic. It helps to lock the handle and then stand upwind until the tank is full. Some also wear a respirator. Gloves or paper towels are used to avoid gasoline on the hand.



Air purifiers are commonly used in houses. City people may also have one in their car, as shown here. Most models are not effective, but there are brands designed for MCS people, including Austin, E.L. Foust, and Aireox.



Clothes can be difficult. Cotton and nylon are often the best materials, while polyester is less tolerable. Then there are all the chemicals the garment is treated with. Detoxing new clothes can take weeks.



Regular laundry products are full of fragrances and other chemicals that make the clothes stink and itch. People with MCS use a variety of alternatives. None of them work for everyone, they must be tried individually.



Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate, called natron in some countries). It has many uses in a non-toxic household, such as laundry detergent, all-purpose cleaner, poultice for insect bites, toothpaste, and antacid for upset stomach.



Aluminum foil also has many uses in the MCS household, such as sealing walls and kitchen cabinets to lessen the chemical fumes. Some people use foil to exchange stinky bank notes or to protect letters from contamination while passing through the mail service.



Almost all "wood" furniture and cabinets are made of toxic laminates, plywood, etc. Kitchen cabinets, tables, and chairs made of steel and glass are much healthier. They can be low-cost versions, as shown here, or much fancier (expensive) versions. Patio furniture is often used.



New purchases of synthetic materials may have to be offgassed before they can be taken into the home. Here a new pair of shoes are left outside on a covered porch for several months. Some people have a separate room or garden shed to offgas things.



New cars reek of toxic chemicals for many years. People with MCS usually drive older cars that have offgassed, and not become contaminated by previous owners' use of fragrances or cigarettes.



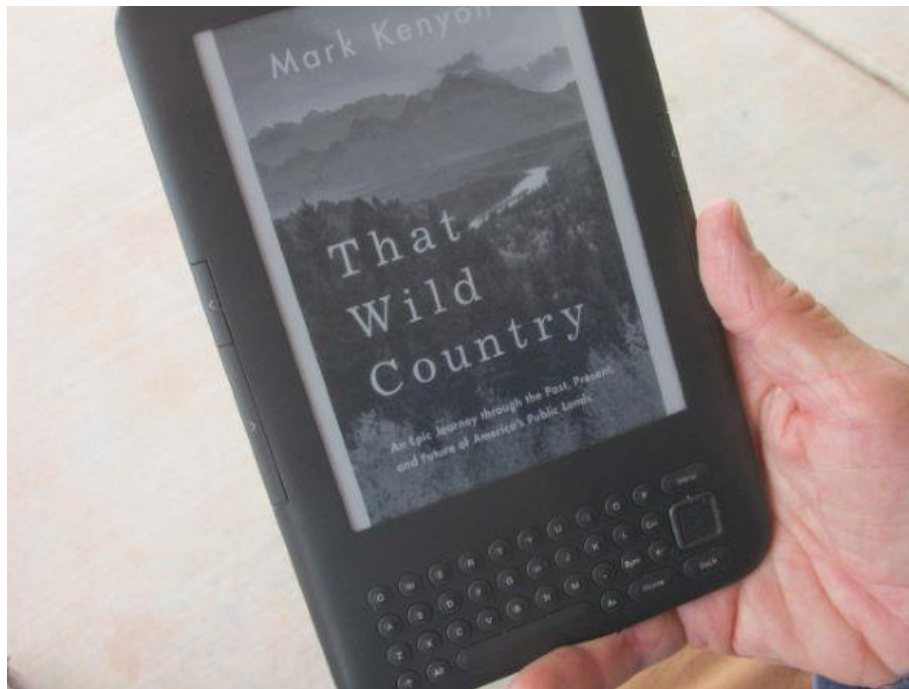
The fillers in supplements and drugs are important to check. They may include preservatives, food allergens, dyes, and more. Some people have to use compounded drugs or test several brands to find drugs they tolerate.



Preservatives can cause symptoms. Here are eye drops without preservatives, as the regular kind may sting the eyes.



The health care system is not helpful, and sometimes hostile. Many then try alternatives, such as the myriad nutritional supplements in the hope some will help.



Some read books using an electronic reader, like this Kindle. There are no fumes, but some do not tolerate the electromagnetic radiation it constantly gives off.



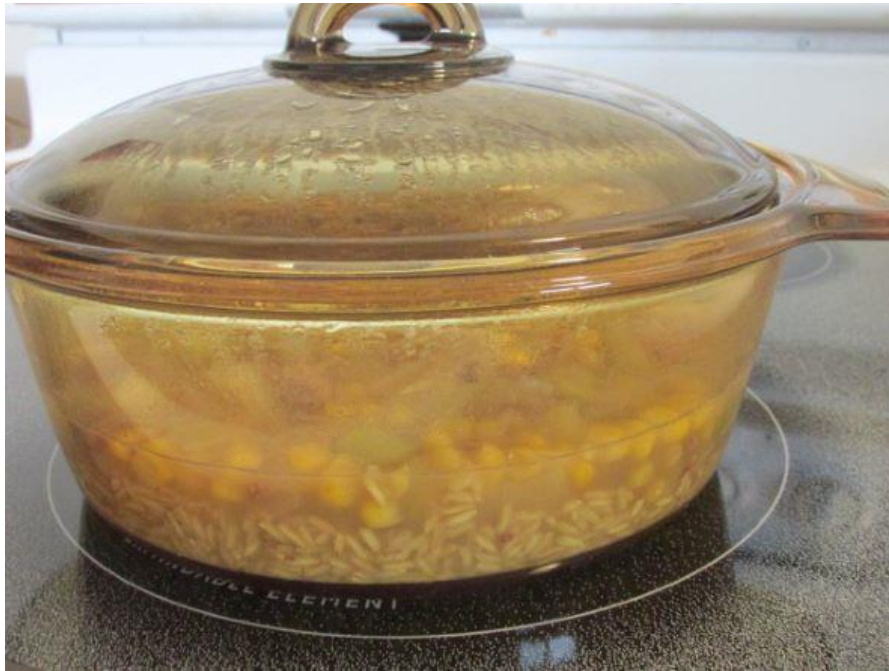
Photocopies, cut-up books, and received letters are aired out inside this steel garden shed.



Some use reading boxes to protect against the fumes from books and magazines.



Many households have sophisticated water filtration systems.



Cookware with non-stick surfaces is usually avoided. The safest kind of cookware are made of glass, such as this pot imported from France.



Regular shampoos are loaded with fragrances and other chemicals. Fortunately, there are many healthier products available, though they are not found in the local grocery store. The least toxic shampoos are expensive and may not even be carried by a health food store.



Stores are toxic. Some use respirators or have the staff do the shopping.



Indoor public entertainment is usually too toxic, but outdoor fairs are fine if not too crowded.



Having non-toxic friends over for a board game. Just make sure to offgas the board and game pieces first.



Most beverages are loaded with chemical additives, including beer and wine. Many get sick from any sort of alcohol, but some can enjoy German beer, as the laws there prohibit all additives.



A respirator can be very helpful, but most won't use them in public.



Hair salons are very toxic. Some hairdressers will cut people outside. In areas with an MCS community, they may find a hairdresser who has MCS and arranges "hair parties."



Having a living Christmas tree, or one of plastic, can cause symptoms from the fumes. A "tree" of steel is reusable and safe, though it may need initial offgassing of any coatings.



Humor is helpful too!

These are just examples of what some people do to cope with severe MCS. Other measures include organic foods, chlorine shower filters, town clothes, guest clothes, pee-bottles to avoid public restrooms, and much else.

More information

Descriptions of MCS homes are at www.eiwellspring.org/housingcases.html

General information about MCS on www.eiwellspring.org/intromenu.html

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