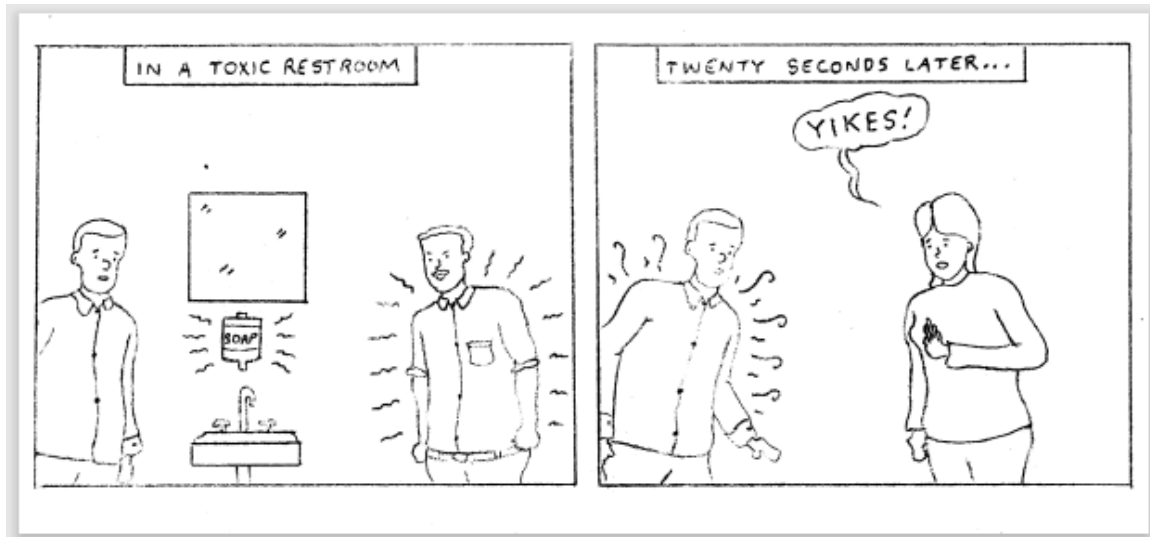


MCS stories about indirect exposures to fragrances and other chemicals



When you walk into a store or share an office with someone using cologne, your clothes will pick up the chemical fumes. The clothes then stink until they are washed. Here are some real-life stories about how this affects people with severe MCS.

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One of the hardest things for outsiders to understand about MCS is indirect exposures – also called “thirdhand exposure.” When you’ve been inside a store, your clothes smell like that store. Visiting a public restroom will also stink up your clothes with fragrances. When you’ve been next to someone wearing fragrances, your clothes smell like those fragrances.

Your hair is as absorbent as your clothes, so it too will smell like the places you’ve been.

If you go to really toxic places, your breath will for hours carry the fumes you breathed in. Sometimes it even comes out through your skin in the perspiration and skin oil (sebum).

People who are not hypersensitive to these things are not even aware of it. To them it seems impossible it can bother anyone, much less make them sick. But it can and does for people with severe multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS).

Here are some true stories that are both entertaining and get the point across.

One minute

A patient at the Environmental Health Center in Dallas came from another state. During his stay he rented a room at a place that specialized in housing people with severe MCS.

Every day he drove to the clinic in Dallas. The air inside was so pristine his clothes never picked up any smells. But if he shopped at Whole Foods on his way, his clothes did pick up some “store smells,” so he took a shower and put on clean clothes when he got back.

This was before digital cameras took over photography. One day he needed to turn in a roll of film to be developed. He went to a Walmart that had their photo shop right in the entryway. It was a pleasant fall day, so the big glass doors were left wide open. The distance from the entrance to the photo counter was about 30 feet (10 meters). It took just one minute to drop the roll in the box and walk back out.

He then drove to the MCS housing place. On the walkway from the parking lot, he got within twenty feet (7 meters) of a neighbor he was friendly with, when she urgently asked, “Where have you been? You smell of pesticides!”

Stores in Texas spray a lot to prevent bugs. Perhaps that store was sprayed the previous evening. He had been no other place than the MCS clinic that day.

The smoky bar

One time the husband of someone with severe MCS really wanted to enjoy an important football game played by his favorite team. The couple had recently moved to Dallas and didn’t have any friends who were sports fans, so he went to a local sports bar to be among other fans.

This was in 2002 when smoking was still allowed in bars. He was “loaded” with smoke when he returned home. He bathed and changed clothes, but his wife could still smell smoke on him. More bathing didn’t help. It took a few days before his body finally got rid of all the smoke and fumes he had breathed in.

Thirdhand by phone

A Canadian woman's live-in boyfriend one day came home from work smelling of cologne. This was very puzzling as he had not been around anyone wearing cologne. Sniffing him over, she could tell it was just on one ear – the same ear he used with his telephone. This was in the 1990s, before mobile phones took over. Apparently someone wearing cologne had used his desk phone while he was away from his desk and some cologne must have rubbed off onto the headset, and from there to his ear when he later used the phone (Chircop 1997).

Teenage detention

A family with two teenage daughters built a specially designed healthy house in rural Arizona. It was built with non-toxic materials and had a special room where family members could detox if they became too smelly. The room had its own bathroom and a big glass door into the living/dining room, so the person in “detention” could still be a part of family life through the closed door.

The room also had a door directly to the outside so the smelly person didn't stink up the house when coming in, and had direct access to a porch.

It was rare someone actually had to stay in the room overnight. Mostly it was used for showering after work or a visit to a store. It also served as a guest bedroom.

But sometimes a family member came home from a really toxic event or business trip, where showering was not enough. Or the teenage daughters thought the cosmetics they tried at a friend's house would just wash off.

The toxic cat

A man's cat suddenly developed major dental problems. He was not able to get an appointment quickly enough with the regular vet and called other vets until he found one who could see them right away. The clinic was super toxic, but he was able to be inside briefly with a respirator on. It was so bad he could smell it through the heavy-duty filters.

When he later picked up the cat, its fur stunk terribly. Back at home a neighbor lent him a jar of bentonite clay, which he rubbed into the fur and then brushed out again. That helped tremendously.

Toxic church

For many years, there was a camp for people with severe MCS located southeast of Dallas, Texas. The grounds were very lush so they had a full-time

groundskeeper, who also did cleaning work and other daily chores. He did not have MCS himself but tried to not make the residents sick. That was not easy. He was given free non-toxic detergents and other products, which helped, but somehow he kept having days where the residents had to flee from him.

They noticed it was always worse on Mondays. Why was that? Then one Sunday morning one of the residents walked past the church the groundskeeper attended. Worshippers were arriving; they were all very highly fragranced and could be smelled far away. It was extremely bad.

This was likely the reason why the groundskeeper was so smelly on Mondays; he had breathed in that toxic stew for hours and was still breathing and sweating it out the next day.

Notes

These stories all involve people with very severe MCS. Most people with this disease are not that severe. The stories were either experienced by this writer, or told directly by the person it involved. One story comes from a published account.

The Environmental Health Center in Dallas had a device that people breathed into. It was able to detect hundreds of chemicals on people's breath.

Referenced story

Chircop, Andrea. The experience of women living with environmental illness, Master's thesis, Dalhousie University, 1997.

More information

More stories about life with chemical sensitivities at www.eiwellspring.org/facesandstories.html