

## What is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity?

<<In a survey of 6,800 chemically sensitive persons, 80 percent asserted they knew 'when, where, with what, and how they were made ill' - of the 80 percent, 60 percent blamed pesticides>>

Source: *Chemical Exposures - Low Levels and High Stakes*, Nicholas Ashford, Ph.D., J.D., Associate professor of technology and policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Claudia Miller, M.D

MCS otherwise known as Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, is known to affect at least 15% of the population and it is estimated that at least 35 to 40% of people are affected to some degree and do not know it. How does someone know that they are affected, and why are they affected? Dr. Claudia S Miller a researcher from the University of Texas who has on several occasions been hired by the World Health Organization to investigate this illness refers to it as T.I.L.T. (Toxic Induced Loss of Tolerance). In other words a person can after numerous exposures to a chemical or a soup of several chemicals start becoming ill and will after a period of time develop reproducible symptoms when re-exposed to the same chemical.

Sometimes even a ONE time exposure to the chemical can cause a person to become ill. Symptoms noticed may be mental confusion, headaches, muscle aches, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, itchy skin, almost every system of the body can be affected. Unfortunately the symptoms may 'snowball' into other symptoms and a person may develop sensitivities to other chemicals which never previously bothered them, as well as to foods, and inhalants, such as dust and pollen.

A definition has been widely accepted and is found in the next slide. It is written by Nethercott et al (1993). The next slide is an example of a brain that has been severely affected by dursban exposure, which is an organophosphate from the same family as malathion.

MCS is recognized by:

- 1) the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), as of 1998, has granted disability pension compensation in 44% of applicants (Farthing, 1988)
- 2) Favourable appeals for Worker's Compensation have been granted in Nova Scotia and Ontario
- 3) The American Medical Association has granted Continuing Medical Education Accreditation for the past 34 annual scientific seminars in Environmental Medicine
- 4) The Ontario College of Family Physicians has recently developed a Peer Presenter program on environmental health which is CME (MAINPRO) accredited. MCS is included in the presentation.
- 5) Health Canada has sponsored two workshops (1990 and 1992) on MCS.
- 6) The Ontario Ministry of Health published the 'Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Environmental Hypersensitivity Disorders' which provided the first definition. The Ministry funds medical research projects on MCS. In 1994 it provided \$1.5 million for the creation of the Environmental Health Clinic at Women's College Hospital in Toronto;

this clinic collaborates with medical research projects at the University of Toronto.

Once someone becomes environmentally ill, they have to practice avoidance of even small doses of chemicals in order to live a 'normal' type life, where they can think clearly and work effectively and have good relationships with their friends and family. It is a wide encompassing disease which once it affects one person, will end up rippling and affecting many other members of the family and community. It is a very difficult disability for the person who has it, as they can 'look' well and yet feel terrible.

The best way to be is to not ever get yourself in a position where you may be the next person who becomes environmentally ill. So practice preventative avoidance!

*Jennifer Armstrong BSc., MD*