

# Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

He wakes up every morning, complaining of a headache. She seems too eager to be in another room of the house, not her bedroom. He is "all stuffed up" in the morning, but gets better as the day goes on. She is a restless sleeper at night, but naps peacefully on the sofa.

Does your child do better after he has spent some time outside? The improvement you observe in his behavior may be due to more than just "running the energy off."

It could be that there are chemicals in any part of the house that are irritating him and the fresher outside air is responsible for the improvement. We are accustomed to thinking of air pollution as an outside problem. But new evidence indicates that the air inside your home is far more polluted than outdoors and is likely to cause reactions in highly sensitive people.

Before you consider drastic changes in your home or your child's room, try to arrange for a trial period when the child sleeps somewhere else. This could be at a relative's home, a vacation site, or even some other part of your home. If you see a clear improvement when the child is away from his room, then it's probably worthwhile to further try to narrow down the cause(s).

You may even find that just opening your child's window at night brings enough fresh air into the bedroom to relieve the symptoms.

If that isn't enough to make a difference, consider some of these common irritants. Here is a checklist to help you identify things that could be affecting your child (or yourself).

## Strong Smells In Different Parts of the House:

**Bedroom located over a garage or carport.** When you start the car engine, exhaust fumes can seep up to the rooms above. (Don't ever keep a garage door closed while you start the engine. This can be especially dangerous for the driver.) Move the car out from under the house as soon as possible.

**Toxic Chemicals.** Store such as paint thinner, gasoline, etc. in a shed away from the house -- or get rid of them entirely.

**Laminated furniture, or any type that gives off a noticeable odor.** If you are able to do so, return it to the store; if that's not possible, you may be able to contain the fumes by sealing the un-laminated sides of the particleboard. See the February issue of *Pure Facts* for information on sealants.

**Freshly painted walls, woodwork, or furniture.** Paints take time to 'gas out'. The degree of care you will need to use depends on the level of sensitivity. People who are especially vulnerable may need to order special paint from companies that cater to the highly chemically sensitive.

**Cork tiles.** These are created by heating a mixture of cork pieces and petroleum-based binders. They are a potential irritant, especially if they are at the head of the bed.

**Wallpaper paste.** They contain chemical fungicides. This could be a problem if the head of the bed is against the wall. Try moving the bed away from the wall and see if there's any change.

**Cedar-lined** closets might be an irritant. Freshly dry cleaned clothes and moth balls are very undesirable.

**Detergent, fabric softening strips.** Wash new linens before you use them, but stay away from fragrances in laundry products. Sheets and pajamas that pick up these chemicals will affect a child for the many hours he spends in bed.

**Fire-retardant chemicals** on pajama fabrics have bothered some children. Test for this by allowing your child to substitute well-worn-and-washed play clothes.

**Electric blankets.** Some critics also question. As a precaution, stick with ordinary blankets or quilts.

**Bath time.** Stay away from the scented soaps, shampoos, etc., and from dyed bath products such as bubble bath and soap crayons.

**Scented toys** stickers, markers, or any type of cologne is a no-no for sensitive people.

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## **New Carpeting**

While most Feingold members need not be as cautious, highly sensitive people may be unable to tolerate the chemicals used in new carpeting.

There are many powerful chemicals which typically go into the process of manufacturing carpeting. The most potent of these appears to be "4-phenylcyclohexane," or "4-PC," the compound which gives new carpets their characteristic smell.

Debra Lynn Dadd, who has written extensively on environmental issues, notes: "While industry claims that animal tests show 4-PC to be harmless, an EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) risk assessment group predicted that it could create nervous system and genetic problems. "We also point out the similarity between 4-PC and phencyclidine, which on the street is known as angel dust," a Washington D.C. chemist working on the problem states, "All in all we have a lot of reason to suspect that 4-PC is a pretty nasty chemical."

As the chemicals "gas out" of new carpeting, the smell will fade. In just a few days the residue of fumes will be reduced by about half. Without adequate ventilation, however, especially in commercial buildings, fumes can remain strong enough to cause problems for some people for many months. If you are planning to have carpeting installed it would be wise to try to allow it to air out as much as possible. Perhaps the retailer could unroll the carpeting the night before it is to be delivered. If it will be installed when the weather is mild, you may be able to keep the windows open. If you are moving to a new home, consider having the carpeting installed well before the move.

One Feingold family who had new wall-to-wall carpeting installed with no adverse reaction describes their experience: they did a lot of sniffing when they shopped, and found many carpets had no obvious odor. Dupont Stainmaster was chosen, and the retailer agreed to unroll the carpet the night before it was to be installed. When the old carpeting was removed, the latex padding was in very good condition, so it was used instead of the new foam. The weather was good, so they kept the windows open just as precaution.

Henry Slack, the Indoor Air Program Manager for EPA Region IV, recommends the following: When buying carpet, request a water based or low emitting adhesive if the carpet is going to be glued down to a slab. Of course, if you don't have to glue it, that's better. If installing carpet in one room at a time, put an exhaust fan in the window of that room and pull air out of the window so it doesn't circulate into house. Whether one room or the whole house, ventilate with outside air as much as possible, but make sure your source of outside air is not near vehicle exhaust pipes or other pollution sources. Also, ask the carpet supplier and installer for the material safety data sheets (MSDS) on all products to be used. MSDS sheets are required by law to be available for the consumer. Explain to the supplier your concern about the carpet and that you need to find products with fewer emissions as a matter of health, not just preference .... He says, 'Until we all, as consumers, get carpet suppliers to listen, things won't change.'

The Information Number of the EPA Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Information Clearing House is: 800-438-4318 available weekdays: 9-5 EST. You can also check out their web site at <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/>

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## Other areas

**Vehicle Exhaust.** When you are in high traffic areas, close the car windows and air-intake vents, and adjust the controls to recirculate inside air. If this is not enough, you may want to purchase charcoal-impregnated masks at a safety supply store. They are light, disposable, inexpensive, and they help screen out noxious fumes, perfumes, etc. Also think about the school bus if your child rides on a daily basis.

**Office Machinery** Things such as copiers, printers and ink can give off irritating fumes. Reduce the concentration by increasing air circulation (open a nearby window, or consider installing an exhaust fan).

**New Clothing** Before you wear new clothing, wash it to remove the formaldehyde and other finishing chemicals. For extremely sensitive people, this is not sufficient. Some may have an issue with dry cleaned clothing as well. You may want to seek out "green cotton" (untreated). It is available from Seventh Generation, Colchester, VT 05446-1672. Phone (800) 456-1177.

**Cleaning Products** When you first start the Program, you will have a good excuse not to overdo use of cleaning products; there is a short listing of acceptable products in the Foodlist/Shopping Guide, and you will be amazed at how much you can do with baking soda. As far as carpet cleaning, floor waxing .... why not wait a month or so before thinking about it?

For a comprehensive resource on non-toxic formulas for cleaning just about everything imaginable, consider the new book, *Clean & Green*, by Annie Berthold-Bond (\$8.95, available from Greenkeeping, Box 28, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504).

Sometimes a clever soul comes up with a product that makes caustic cleaners unnecessary. "The Plumbing Window" is a sink trap which replaces an existing pipe. The drain can easily be cleaned out by unscrewing a special cap attached to filters. When you pull out the cap, the gunk comes along with it. (\$9.95 plus \$3.00 shipping, contact Marque Enterprises, 3530 McCall Road S., Suite D, Englewood, FL 34224-8655 Phone: (813)475-0164)

**Cosmetics and Perfume** Fragrances and dyes are irritants in many products. Sensitive people may be unable to tolerate the powerful chemicals in nail polish remover and the glues used with artificial nails. Most perfume contain synthetic ingredients.

**Moth Balls** In the new book, *Healthy Homes, Healthy Kids*, the authors suggest storing woolen clothes in a hot attic during the summer since the heat will kill all stages of the moth life cycle. (*Healthy Homes, Healthy Kids*, by Joyce M. Schoemaker, Ph.D. and Charity Y. Vitale, Ph.D., published by Island Press, Covelo, CA and Washington, DC (202) 232-7933 \$12.95 paperback)

**Particle Board** It is increasingly difficult to find furniture made from solid wood. The resins used in particle board contain formaldehyde, and this "gasses off," releasing fumes that can be irritants. Some people find they can tolerate furniture made from particle board if all of it is painted with a sealant. Plywood may also be treated with formaldehyde. (See the February, 1992 **Pure Facts** for product information.)

**Foam Insulation** Mobile homes are particularly likely to be a problem if they contain urea-formaldehyde foam insulation since their size and tight construction concentrate the fumes.

**Pesticides** Chemicals designed to damage the nervous system of insects are not likely to be kind to humans. Many mail-order companies provide safer alternatives. See **Pure Facts**, March 1991.

**Gas Stove Emissions** This isn't as potent a problem as kerosene heaters, but gas stoves are generally on the hit list for chemically sensitive families. If you experience symptoms only in the kitchen, it's a tip-off that the gas stove could be the culprit.

**Smoke** Cigarette smoke, fireplace smoke, wood stoves, and even food cooked over a grill, have been identified by Feingold members as irritants.

**Scented Products** Scented candles, incense, pot pourri ... you name it! If it smells, it can cause trouble for some people. Fragrance strips in magazines have received a lot of notoriety lately, since the encapsulated fragrances often break open during shipping. Can you believe there are stores which sell just home fragrances?

**Pillows** Some people have trouble with feathers or down; others don't tolerate foam. If you notice symptoms are worst after awakening, try substituting a thick, cotton bath towel, folded and inserted in a pillow case. It won't be soft, but it will help you narrow down the culprit.