

Environmental Obstacles To Cure

An increasingly toxic world has brought with it increasing toxicity to human life, which can result in seemingly mysterious illnesses caused by environmental factors. This chapter describes some problems that many practitioners miss. If you aren't getting better, see if any these match your experience.

SYMPTOMS OF MOLD EXPOSURE

- Headaches
- Depression
- Irritability
- Joint pain
- Fatigue
- Brain fog
- Respiratory problems
- Aching joints
- Constant colds
- Sore throat
- Sweating
- Severe irritability

POTENTIAL REACTIONS TO NEW CARPET

- Headaches
- Joint pain
- Fatigue
- Brain fog
- Respiratory problems
- Sore throat
- Sweating

MOLD

Mold toxicity is a common problem. In fact, it has become so common and so expensive to treat that most insurance companies now refuse to insure homeowners against damage or injury caused by mold.

Leaking windows can result in mold growth. A leak into your wall or roof can lead to mold growth behind sheet rock. Improperly vented crawl spaces under the house or in the attic above, or a carpet that got wet and was not properly dried can all lead to mold growth. Fortunately, most of the time you can smell the mustiness or dank mold unless you are so congested from the mold exposure that your nose is clogged.

Besides congestion and sinusitis, symptoms of mold exposure can manifest as headaches, fatigue, depression, severe irritability, joint aching, and constant colds and bronchitis. Mold specialists can test walls for dampness or use mold plates to test for mold, although these tests are not foolproof.

NEW CARPETING

Old carpets can provide a welcoming habitat for mold, dust, and dander, provoking breathing problems and other symptoms of mold exposure (see above). New carpets pose different problems. I know numerous people who have gotten ill after new carpets and padding were placed in their apartment, house, or office. Fortunately, there are new carpets and glues with much lower VOC (volatile organic chemical) levels. Hardwood flooring or tile is best for people with allergies, although tile throughout the house can be tiring to walk on. If you feel ill after being in a building where new carpet has just been installed, get out into the fresh air and try to avoid continued exposure.

SYMPTOMS OF HEAVY METAL TOXICITY

- Memory problems
- Joint pain
- Allergies
- Sinusitis
- Muscle spasm
- Drooling

HEAVY METAL TOXICITY

Many of us have been exposed to heavy metals. From the age of twelve on, I painted the walls whenever we moved into a new house. I did it for pocket money and because I liked painting. Unfortunately, my mother did not realize the paint had lead and that I have a genetic abnormality (MTHFR) that makes it more difficult for me to detoxify heavy metals and mold. Exposure to the paint as well as other indoor allergens was partly why I had so many allergies and asthma growing up. Luckily, we moved into California. In California I could run, jump, and play in lots of fresh air. With all that exercise, I became healthy.

Thank goodness public health has come a long way since I was a child and we now know how dangerous mercury, lead, and other toxic metals are. Once these heavy metals have been absorbed into the body, we can test for them. Many brave scientists and doctors have found ways to detoxify patients. If you suspect that your lingering health problems may involve heavy metal toxicity, a functional medicine practitioner may have a protocol to test and treat for this condition.

PESTICIDE EXPOSURE

Pesticides are extremely dangerous chemicals. They are neurotoxins that can have devastating effects on the nervous and immune systems. They are not just poisonous to pests; they are poisonous to you.

KEVIN, a hard-charging CEO, went to Hawaii for a long vacation. Unfortunately he rented a house near a pineapple plantation. Once or twice a week a small plane would fly over the plantation, releasing a steady stream of pesticides. Kevin got sicker and sicker. Glands all over his body swelled. He saw several doctors in Hawaii but they had no idea what was happening to him. They tested him for mono. He didn't have it.

Kevin returned to the states feeling very ill. When I saw him, his joints hurt, he had a chronic sore throat and couldn't think clearly. He improved a little after a few treatments, but he still felt terrible. I told him I thought the repeated pesticide exposure had damaged his immune system and referred him to a specialist.

SYMPTOMS OF PESTICIDE EXPOSURE

ACUTE EXPOSURE

- Tears in the eyes
- Runny nose
- Increased saliva
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Sweating
- Shallow breathing
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Moodiness

CHRONIC EXPOSURE

All of the symptoms to the left, plus:

- Immune problems
- General weakness
- Dizziness
- Memory problems
- Brain fog
- Irritability
- Slowed reflexes
- Nervousness
- General decline in health

I've had patients since Kevin with similar exposures and have watched some of them succeed in making a slow slog back to partial health using a combination of exercise, sauna, and detoxifying nutritional support. Others are stuck with permanent immune and neurological damage. Some people's genetic make-up will determine how well they detoxify pesticides and other chemicals. People with the MTHFR genetic abnormality and some others are especially vulnerable to insult.

You don't have to live near a pineapple plantation to be affected by pesticides. If they spray your building for pests every month, you may be exposed. If you keep a can of pesticide ready to attack kitchen pests, you may be exposed. Chronic exposure to even low levels of pesticides can seriously damage your health. Please accept living with some bugs, and when you must limit their interference with your life, choose nontoxic products.

THE MYSTERIOUS UNSEEN HAZARD

I'll relay this history as I heard it. It is one of the more unusual cases of environmental hazards that I have encountered in my years of practice.

George flew from New York to see me as his brother in California knew I often found solutions when other doctors failed. George could hardly sit still. His foot tapped on the floor, his large hands slapped his knees. He was in an absolute panic. He couldn't stand living inside his skin. "My insides buzz. I feel all wound up. I can only sleep for a few minutes at a time. I'm about to lose my job." He had a lucrative job as an electronics technician for a computer company.

I asked how his troubles started. "I moved into a new apartment about six months ago. I felt a buzzing when I lay down. Each morning I felt increasingly awful so I bought a Trifield meter to measure the electromagnetic field by my bed. The charge was so high the needle went off the chart. I called the landlord. He told me I was being ridiculous. So I hired an electrician. The electrician found that the wiring had been installed wrong—no one had grounded it. This lack of grounding caused tremendous charges to rush through the wall near my bed. This massive force could have started a fire. Four months ago my landlord fixed the wiring but I still feel awful."

I had George lie down on the treatment table and put my hands on his head. His cranial rhythmic impulse was weak but contained an erratic, high frequency just like Stephanie's, the woman who'd almost died in the car crash. In my experience, this kind of frantic frequency reveals a nervous system still in shock. George had suffered from a mild (in that it didn't kill him) electrocution similar to what people suffer when they have been struck

by lightning. I gave George the appropriate homeopathic remedy and used my hands to restore balance to his autonomic nervous system and remove the shock.

After three treatments in 10 days, he could sleep well for the first time in months. He felt he'd regained much of his health. I referred him to an osteopathic colleague in New York to see when he got home. A few months later he dropped me a note to say that he was doing great. He had returned to his job and despite all the electrical exposure at work he felt fine.

SYMPTOMS OF EMF SENSITIVITY

- Extreme anxiety and agitation
- Headaches
- Inability to relax
- Memory problems

George's case is an extreme example of the damage electromagnetic forces can do. Clearly some people are more sensitive than others. In my practice I've found that patients with a previous neurological insult—brain injury, seizure disorders, autism, cerebral palsy—are often the most sensitive. Our nervous systems also seem to be most sensitive when we sleep.

To minimize the electromagnetic current flowing around us, I recommend people unplug their wireless Internet connections before going to bed. Automatic garage door openers transmit a lot of current. If you sleep over or near the garage door opener I recommend you turn it off before going to bed. You can check the sockets in your house with a Gauss or Trifield meter like George did.

There are various ways to remediate excess electric charge, keeping in mind that if it's a really serious problem like George's, only an electrician is qualified to deal with the issue. For more subtle distortions, there are several products that help counter electromagnetic charge and whole house filters for people who are exceedingly sensitive.

You may not have had a problem with electromagnetic currents until trauma disrupted your nervous system. Patients with Lyme disease often seem to have electromagnetic sensitivity. But I also recommend people with neurological disease like Parkinson's, M.S. and epilepsy pay attention to ways electromagnetic currents could compromise their nervous system. And I am horrified by the "Smart Meters" being installed in certain areas of the country. Smart Meters send a significant electrical impulse countless times a day into your house to monitor your electrical usage. I suspect this can be an especially serious problem for children's neurological diseases like epilepsy or ADHD. We have to live amongst so much electromagnetic charge—wireless, cell phone signals—why make matters worse?

SYMPTOMS OF METHANE GAS EXPOSURE

- Headache
- Difficulty breathing
- Nausea and vomiting
- Heart palpitations
- Dehydration
- Memory loss
- Loss of coordination
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision

METHANE GAS

Worried parents brought their miserable, 20-month-old daughter to see me. Betty was stumbling, had fits of anger, held her head at times, and seemed to be having trouble learning. No doctor could tell them what was wrong. Her symptoms didn't fit into any definable syndromes.

I put my hands on Betty. She fiercely tried to squirm out of my hands but I didn't take her squirming too seriously. Many young children hate to lie down and be treated—they seem to find such imposition a profound insult. She also cried a pitiful cry. But despite her whimpering cry and her squirming I could feel her irritated nervous system. I couldn't tell what kind of irritation had given her nervous system such a weak erratic rhythm. Her body didn't have the gluey feeling of a bacterial infection, or the high-pitched frequency of a viral syndrome. She had no fever. Structurally, her

body was well aligned. Her dural membranes around her brain were tight but I found no structural distortion in her skull.

I asked the parents more questions. After a while the mother admitted that she herself

had been feeling a bit woozy for several weeks. The father shrugged and said he was fine. I asked if there had been a history of water leaks in their house. They said, “No leaks, but we do live in a trailer. It’s fairly new.”

I treated the child and told them to come back in a week. Since both the mother and child were experiencing similar unpleasant symptoms I suspected something environmental. With the patients’ permission, I spoke to my office administrator. She had redone several houses and knew quite a bit about health hazards associated with housing. She listened to the child’s symptoms and told me, “Have the father check for a methane leak. A disconnection in the sewage line happens more easily with a trailer and could cause the symptoms the child and mother have.”

On the next visit the child was no better. I passed on the office manager’s suggestion. That day the father went under the house, found a loose sewage line connection, and fixed it. Within a week both the mother and child’s symptoms disappeared.

Methane gas is odorless and colorless. Over time, it depletes the oxygen levels in the blood, causing the kind of neurological and cognitive symptoms listed above.

Methane exposure of this sort is quite uncommon. But this story teaches us two things: good doctors often have to search for help from several different sources, and you must be a relentless detective. Trust your instincts. If you think something is wrong, it probably is.

Luckily, most people are pretty resilient and can adapt to the hazards of daily life, especially once shock has been removed, their body moves well and they ingest healthy food. When you are ill, it is critical that you keep an open mind and be flexible. Most patients have an inherent sense of what went wrong inside them and what caused the problem if they can just trust themselves and listen to whatever “peculiar” suspicions arise. Take charge, be curious, be persistent, and never give up.