

Healthy Living: Living with a Chronic Illness

Clean food, clean water and fresh air will help you begin to gain control of your health and start the road to recovery. By reducing environmental stress you decrease your total load and increase your capacity to deal with those things that you have no control over.

- Choose healthy beverages to drink such as water. City water contains chlorine and it is recommended that you filter before use.
- If your water is supplied by a well you should test well water every 6-12 months for contaminants, and correct any problem that is found.
- Decrease the amount of processed foods in your diet.
- Eat organic/whole foods when possible.
- Stop any habits that are addictive and known to be harmful (smoking, high caffeine consumption etc.)

Daily Living

You need to consider your day to day living which means paying attention to products that you use and your routines.

Personal Products

- Use Fragrance Free and more natural products whenever possible.
- Unscented does not necessarily mean Fragrance free, you must read the ingredients label to see if the product contains fragrance.
- It is possible to reduce environmental stress in your home by reducing fragrance and chemical usage. It means paying attention to all personal products including body wash, soap, hand sanitizer, deodorants, shaving products, hair sprays, shampoo, conditioner and all cosmetics.
- The air that you breathe is from the area closest to your body, your personal cloud. Reducing your chemical usage cleans your personal cloud and reduces environmental stress.
- Being hypersensitive means that you have a greater potential to adversely react to any manufactured product – certain symptoms may mean that you should pay attention to such things as hair coloring, toothpaste, mouthwash, toilet tissue and feminine hygiene products.

Household Products

- There are many Fragrance Free cleaners, laundry detergents, soaps, shampoo etc...available on the market at various prices.
- Remember that “green” or “natural” does not always mean that they are the healthiest item for you. However the simpler, more natural products with full information provided on the label are likely to be better for you.
- Remember that “parfum” or “fragrance” is a label that provides very little information. They are likely to contain materials that the manufacturer does not have to reveal for proprietary reasons, but may contain ingredients that are hazardous to your health.
- Natural cleaners/disinfectants include -
 - Borax and water
 - vinegar
 - baking soda and water
 - hydrogen peroxide

General Maintenance:

- Frequent dusting with a wet cloth. A dry cloth does not pick up the dust but simply spreads it around and into the air.
- Vacuum frequently, use a central vacuum vented to the outside or a vacuum with a HEPA filter.
- If you are not using something store it.
- If you do not use something for 6-12 months get rid of it.
- Do not store anything under your bed, it increases dust.
- Do not store boxes on your basement floor, this increases the risk of mould

Personal Habits:

- Decrease clutter, knickknacks and collectables as they hold dust and are hard to clean.
- Ensure that plants inside your home are well maintained as they are potential sites for mould growth.
- Bedrooms are for sleeping and should not double as a work room, study, storage area or play room.
- Reduce unnecessary stress from Radio frequency radiation and microwave radiation. Remove electrical equipment from being close to you when in bed. Use mobile and wireless phones wisely.
- Keep pets out of your bedroom as far as possible, and do not allow them on your bed or to sleep anywhere in the room!
- Ensure that litter boxes are well maintained and not located close to food preparation areas, eating areas or locations where you spend much time.

Closets:

- Do not over stuff closets, air needs to be able to circulate. Dead air increases the chance of mould growing.
- If you have been somewhere and picked up a scent, smoke etc...do not put these clothes back in the closet launder them, or air them out first.
- If you dry clean clothes ensure that they are well aired out before bringing them into a closet in your bedroom
- Do not keep clothes or blankets in cedar chests, and do not keep cedar chests in your bedroom. The cedar resins are volatile, hence the smell, and cannot usually be tolerated by chemically sensitive people.
- DO NOT USE DEODORIZERS, MOTH BALLS OR “AIR FRESHENERS” – these contain material that is irritating and toxic. All chemically sensitive individuals will react but these products are not healthy for anyone.
- Do not hang recently dry cleaned clothes in closets and never in you bedroom. They should be hung outside and given time for the cleaning chemicals to dissipate.

Laundry Products & Methods:

- Choose laundry products that are recommended by ICCS. There are good effective detergents that are readily available that the majority of chemically sensitive people are able to tolerate.
- Do not use antistatic sheets or additives. Our research has shown that the majority of chemically sensitive people react to dryer sheets. Use alternatives like a loosely crumpled ball of aluminum foil (shiny side out).
- Remember that whilst the majority of chemically sensitive people are intolerant of many laundry products, some people have true allergies to detergents.
- Wash bed linens in hot water to kill dust mites
- For those items that are difficult to wash such as wool blankets or stuffed toys, freezing also kills dust mites.
- Only hang clothes on a clothes line if there is no wood smoke in the area.

Bed Linens:

- Launder your bed sheets at least once per week to decrease dust mites and any transference of chemicals or scents you may have picked up during your day.
- If buying new bed linen, 100% organically grown, unbleached cotton is recommended. However these can be costly so 100% cotton is an acceptable alternative. Purchase the lightest color available in order to decrease the amount of dye. Dyes contains synthetic chemicals that many cannot tolerate.
- Launder new sheets before putting them on the bed. This is to reduce scents (chemical contamination) from the manufacturing or packaging.

Pillows:

- Cotton filled is best.
- “Polyester fluff” filled are tolerated by some sensitive people as well.
- Need to be able to be laundered.
- Cover your pillow with barrier cloth (cotton with a thread count of 300 or greater) to decrease dust mites.

The Bed:

- Cover mattress and pillows with covers to decrease dust mites (thread count 300 or greater)
- Vacuum mattress whenever you change your sheets to decrease dust mites.
- A new mattress needs to be given time to off gas before being brought into the bedroom. They have been sprayed with fire retardants and contain various synthetic materials. It is difficult to predict how long you should wait but may take 30 days or more.
- Fire retardants are required by law. To purchase a completely natural bed is possible but difficult and expensive.

Renovations and refurbishing

These following suggestions are meant to be guidelines and may differ depending your individual circumstances – your level of sensitivity and state of ill health. The purpose of modifying your environment is to reduce environmental stress, which frees up energy to assist your recovery. It is important to understand that not all changes can happen at once. There are other inherent problems in purchasing new items, it is almost impossible to test any item for tolerance and suitability in a store. There are too many other things around to reach a sound conclusion. It has been our experience that once an item is brought into the home tolerance or intolerance is more readily defined. This makes purchase difficult, frustrating and potentially very expensive. We are always willing to assist with helping you understand what your priorities may be when you begin treatment at ICCS

Furniture

- Most furniture today is made with plywood, MDF or fiberboard which contain considerable amounts of glue. Consider sealing this type of furniture with a low VOC sealer.
- Lining drawers with aluminum foil and tape limits the transfer of new wood or glue smells to your clothes
- Remove bookshelves from your bedroom. This limits dust, mould and volatile substances from printed material.
- Any new item will require time to off gas before bringing into your home or at least into your bedroom.

Floors:

- If possible remove carpets as they are made with synthetic fibers and hold a lot of dirt, dust mites, mold spores etc
- If you must clean carpets do it on a dry, not humid, day so it dries quickly to prevent the growth of mold
- Hard surface is preferred meaning ceramic, hardwood or laminate. The choice depends upon your level of sensitivity and your financial capacity.
- If this is not affordable simply remove the carpet and seal the floor with a low emissions sealer until it is in the budget to replace with a hard surface.

Walls:

- Paint walls with VOC free paint.
- Wall paper is less desirable due to low level chemical emissions from the materials used in manufacture.
- Remove wall tapestries as they hold dust and mould and are hard to clean.

Windows:

- Choose coverings that can be cleaned easily, for example cotton curtains that can be laundered.
- Blinds are a wise choice but choose inert materials like metal to reduce emissions, particularly from direct sunlight.
- Check windows frequently for mould and clean with borax and water or hydrogen peroxide to kill the mould spores.
- You should change or repair windows if they are leaking or if the seal is broken.

Renovations

- Paint in the warm dry months so windows are able to be open to increase ventilation and increase drying time
- Any renovations where new products are being introduced should be done during the warmer months so that ventilation is more likely to be adequate to limit emissions and exposures.
- Only take on what you can handle. Peace, space and time for rest and restoration are extremely important in managing a chronic illness.
- Areas of extensive renovations need to be isolated from your living area. If that is not possible you need to look at temporary accommodation in a well tolerated environment.
- On return or when using new furnishings you need allow time for adaptation.

Coping Skills: Dealing with Reactions

Prevention:

- Check in (as taught in Whole person education) and be aware at any time as to how much you believe you can tolerate.
- As you strive to reduce symptoms and improve wellbeing remember that an important part of getting well is also identifying your boundaries and learning how to expand your boundaries at a pace that you can handle.
- Decrease your exposures: Minimize situations which you know will cause reactions but do not isolate yourself completely.
- You have control over where you go and how long you stay there.
- If you get in a bad situation quietly remove yourself, do not address the situation when you are reacting, wait until you are feeling better. This way you can think with a clear head!
- As you monitor your boundaries you cannot avoid every possible exposure. You need to accept this and learn how to deal effectively with periods of symptoms and reduced function.

- Be prepared and plan ahead.
- Putting your cars air intake on recirculation works to decrease fume exposure while you are driving (ex: diesel trucks and wood smoke).

Signs and symptoms of a reaction:

- Do frequent “Check-ins” and pay attention to what your body is telling you.
- Be aware of how you feel before you leave home so you can better judge any changes you experience
- Remember not all things that SMELL will cause a reaction.
- Use your nose but don’t make assumptions bases only on smell, some products with no smell can cause problems as well.
- This is why doing a “Check-in” at home in a clean environment before you go out is important.
- It develops a baseline and gives you the ability to judge if you are reacting to something in the environment.
- Watch for delayed reactions, some reactions occur right away while others take time to develop.
- Educate your family and friends on how you react, whether it is your appearance, actions or both that change so they can recognize and help in a situation.

How to manage a reaction:

The overall goal is to learn how to cope with the situation. Please see below for some helpful tips:

1. Keep your cool! You can handle this! Try to stay in control, stay as calm as you can so that you can manage the situation.
2. Learn how emotions (yours and others) can alter your ability to cope. Increased anxiety and fear increase both the intensity and duration of your symptoms.
3. If the surrounding air quality has caused a problem remove yourself from the area as quickly as possible. If it is not possible to leave, open a window and get fresh air. In the absence of a window, get under a fresh air vent to dilute whatever is bothering you (unless it is coming from the vent)
4. After a severe prolonged exposure your clothing, skin and hair will absorb whatever fumes with which you were in contact. Practice the 3 S’s:

Strip ⇒ Shower ⇒ Shampoo

5. If nauseated or having gastrointestinal discomfort (cramping/diarrhea) let nature take its course do not take anti-nausea or anti-diarrhea medication. This is the body’s way of purging the substance it is reacting to.
6. If you use Tri-salts take half a teaspoonful with some fluid, by mouth.
7. At the end of the day take an alkalizing baths with Epsom salts or baking soda (1/2 cup per bath). Rinse after the bath to remove any of the remaining salt before drying.

Remember:

- Avoidance
- Removal
- Fresh Air
- Tri Salts (Discuss with your treating Doctor)

Other techniques can also help when trying to manage a reaction:

Reactions are more likely if your threshold is low, and anxiety or fear lower thresholds. Hypersensitivity of the nervous system is linked to a high state of arousal in the nervous system and we teach various techniques to assist in lowering your level of arousal. Our experience is that as we lower arousal reactivity lessens, symptoms decrease and function improves.

Some of the coping skills learned at ICCS include

- Finding Coherence & the HeartMath techniques and tools (emWave desktop, emWave 2 and Inner Balance)
- Body mind awareness – mindfulness based stress reduction
- Pacing
- Progressive muscle relaxation

No technique will be effective if you do not practice regularly and remember that recovery is about achieving BALANCE in our lives

The purpose of these approaches is to reduce stress, increase capacity and coping skills and is so doing free up energy to heal.

Accommodation at Work & at School

Accommodation may be required for a person who is chronically ill, for example due to pain, fatigue or sensitivity to the environment.

Accommodation is a process and not all recommendations and modifications are successful. When a change has not achieved the result anticipated, it should not be considered a failure, but instead as a worthwhile experience which will help to shape further change and accommodation that will result in either continuing at work or school or a successful return to work or school.

All parties need to understand that for accommodation to be successful all need to work together – employer and employee, school administration and student. The environment is improved as much as is possible and practical and the disabled or challenged person needs to make changes to optimize self-management of their disability.

Each person seeking accommodation is unique and this needs to be recognized. One size does not fit all.

One feature which all environmentally sensitive people have in common is their state of heightened sensitivity within the nervous system. Symptoms are triggered by common environmental contaminants which the majority of the population can tolerate without discomfort. In this case one requirement is for a reduced scent environment which requires a **“scent free policy”**.

- At the present time it is impossible to maintain a completely scent free environment, however a **scent-free policy** is an effective way of limiting scent use and ameliorating the suffering of those who are environmentally sensitive.
- Employers and school administration should be prepared to educate staff on what it means to have a **Reduced Scent Environment** and how compliance will be monitored. Monitoring compliance should be the responsibility of the administration (e.g. teacher, manager, foreman etc.) and not the sensitive, challenged person.
- All employees, staff and students are asked to use only fragrance free personal care products and cosmetics. These are now readily available in most stores and should not represent a hardship in terms of cost or availability.