



FACT SHEET

Fragrance-free
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Fact Sheet

The Importance of Being Fragrance-Free for People with Disabilities



Empowering Community and Removal of Barriers (ECRoB) Project

IT'S ALL ABOUT PRODUCT CHOICE!

Being fragrance-free means avoiding the use of perfumes, colognes, scents, essential oils, incense, masking agents, and other fragranced or scented products found in personal care, laundry, cleaning, and other items. Fragrance-free environments can significantly improve the well-being and accessibility for individuals with different health conditions including but not limited to Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), autism, asthma, COPD, respiratory illnesses, migraines, headaches, dermatitis, and other disabilities.

Why is it important to be fragrance-free?

1. **Promoting Inclusivity and Removing Barriers to Access:** Being fragrance-free creates an inclusive environment where people with disabilities can fully participate without experiencing adverse health effects. The chemicals present in scents, fragrances, perfumes, colognes, etc., can trigger symptoms including headaches, migraines, respiratory distress, dizziness, and nausea, which make it difficult for individuals to engage in social, educational, and work-related activities or to have access to health care and services.
2. **Respiratory Health:** Fragrances and other perfumes contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and allergies. The chemicals in fragrances may irritate the airways, trigger breathing difficulties, and worsen symptoms for individuals with respiratory conditions.
3. **Symptoms of Chemical Products:** People with disabilities, especially those with MCS, can experience severe reactions to even low levels of VOCs contained in fragranced and other products. Fragranced products contain a variety of chemicals that can cause symptoms such as breathing and cognitive difficulties, headaches, skin irritation, and fatigue.
4. **Sensory Reactions:** Many individuals with disabilities, including autism, and sensory processing disorders, have heightened sensitivities to sensory stimuli, including fragrances. Exposure to scents can overwhelm their sensory systems, leading to sensory overload and increased discomfort.

The Effects of Lack of Access:

People who lose or cannot find employment due to barriers present in the air, such as the chemicals contained in perfumes and certain products, can end up on the lower end of the

income scale and can even experience homelessness. Health care, a universal right, becomes out of reach due to a lack of access, which is a risk to the individual. Places of learning and worship and other activities that were once loved are now not possible due to inaccessibility. Life becomes out of bounds. Attitudinal barriers result in stigmatization and labelling of the individual, which can result in extreme vulnerability, isolation, exclusion, poverty, and deep immeasurable loss. All of the above has a socio-economic impact due to increased healthcare utilization and decreased satisfaction with care, unemployment, and the increased need for social assistance.

How many people do fragrances affect?

| Condition | Statistics | Number Diagnosed | Year |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------|
| Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) | Affects 3.5% of Canadians. ^[1] | 1 in 34 | 2020 |
| Asthma | Affects 8.7% of Canadians. 12 years of age and older. ¹ | 1 in 13 | 2020 |
| Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD) | Affects 9.4% of Canadians. ¹ | 1 in 10 | 2018 |
| Migraines | Affect 8.3% of Canadians. ^[2] | 1 in 12 | 2022 |
| Autism Spectrum Disorder | Affects 2% of the Canadian population aged 1-17 years. ^[3] | 1 in 50 children | 2019 |

Accommodating Multiple Disabilities

Being fragrance-free is an important accommodation for individuals with disabilities and other health conditions. By eliminating the barriers, which are fragrances, we create an environment that is accessible and supportive for individuals with diverse needs. This allows access to employment, health care, services, education, worship, and community.

How do you choose appropriate products? It is all about product choice! Choose fragrance-free products with few ingredients and without 'parfum' or 'perfume' added. Always read labels. Labels with 'scent-free', or 'de-scented' can in fact contain scents and a masking agent to mask the scent. (CCOHS.ca)

Therefore, it is important to know that a 'scent-free' or 'de-scented' product can contain chemicals, which are also barriers to inclusion and accessibility to the built environment.

Choose Fragrance-Free! Breathe Clean Air!

References

- [1] Statistics Canada. (2023). Asthma, by age group.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310009608>
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- [3] Government of Canada. (2022). Autism spectrum disorder: Highlights from the 2019 Canadian health survey on children and youth.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder-canadian-health-survey-children-youth-2019.html>