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Navigating the Holidays with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity: Finding Safe Spaces Away from Home

The holiday season is a time for joy, connection, and celebration. However, for individuals with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), this festive time can bring unique challenges. From scented candles to cleaning products, the potential for exposure to chemicals can be overwhelming. This year, we want to provide practical tips to help people with MCS plan ahead, specifically when it comes to finding safe accommodation.

Understanding Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

MCS is a chronic condition in which individuals experience adverse reactions to various chemicals in everyday products. Triggers can include synthetic fragrances, pesticides, fresh paint, cleaning agents, and even certain fabrics. For people living with MCS, these seemingly harmless exposures can result in debilitating symptoms like headaches, respiratory problems, fatigue, and cognitive difficulties.

Holiday Travel: The Unique Challenges

Travel during the holidays may require staying in hotels, which can be a major concern for individuals with MCS. Traditional hotel rooms are often cleaned with strong chemicals, which can trigger adverse reactions for people with



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MCS. However, this does not mean that you or someone you know has to choose between health and social connection. Awareness of MCS has grown over the years, and with it, the availability of chemical-free hotels and accommodations have also grown.

Finding Chemical-Free Hotels

Here are some things to keep in mind when planning your holiday travel:

1. Research Fragrance-Free and green product use Hotels:

There are hotels that use natural cleaning agents, have fragrance-free policies, and are built or renovated using non-toxic materials.

Researching these options in your destination city can ensure a more comfortable stay.

2. Ask the Right Questions:

Before booking, call potential hotels and ask detailed questions about their cleaning products, laundry detergents, and air purification systems. Some hotels may not explicitly advertise as chemical-free but may still offer accommodations that are safer for MCS guests.

3. Explore Allergy-Friendly Rooms:

Some larger hotel chains now offer “allergy-friendly” or hypoallergenic rooms. While they may not be fully chemical-free, these rooms often include features like chemical-free air purifiers, special mattresses, and scent-free cleaning services.

4. Check for “Green” Certifications:

Hotels with green certifications (e.g., LEED, Green Seal) often prioritize eco-friendly and non-toxic cleaning practices. While not always entirely chemical-free, they may still be a safer option for individuals with MCS.



5. **Consider Alternative Accommodation Options:**

Renting a vacation home, Airbnb, or VRBO, are also viable options that give more control over the cleaning products and can bring your own linens and pillows.

6. **Room Location:**

Ask for a room that is not above or near any indoor pools. The chlorine scent can trigger symptoms.

Preparing for the Stay

Here are some things to pack for your trip just to be safe or to provide your guests with MCS:

- **Portable Air Purifiers:** A portable air purifier can help reduce airborne chemicals.
- **Fragrance-Free Toiletries:** Although some hotels offer their own toiletries, bringing your own fragrance-free products can reduce the chance of any reactions
- **Hypoallergenic Bedding:** Consider packing hypoallergenic pillow covers or sheets to avoid any potential reactions.
- **Cleaning Products:** Pack small, travel-sized versions of non-toxic cleaning products to wipe down surfaces upon arrival.

Building Awareness

If you feel comfortable, you can choose to share some of these tips with your friends or family who are hosting over the holidays. Sometimes, just educating hosts about the need for fragrance-free environments can create a safer space for everyone. For instance, requesting scent-free candles or cleaning supplies in shared spaces can make a big difference.



Embracing the Holidays, Safely

The holidays should be a time of relaxation and joy. While MCS can create hurdles, it's possible to enjoy the season with the right planning and accommodations. By prioritizing chemical-free environments, individuals with MCS can travel safely and celebrate without compromising their health.