
Preparing for a Healthcare Appointment When You Have MCS

For most people, healthcare appointments can provide comfort and treatment in times of difficulty. However, for individuals living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), they can often bring about stress and uncertainty. Healthcare settings frequently contain exposures that can cause symptoms before the appointment even starts, from scented waiting rooms and cleaning supplies to air fresheners and personal fragrances. Although medical organizations and providers are responsible for making healthcare accessible, there are steps that can be taken to help people communicate their needs and get ready for their appointments. Planning in advance can increase the possibility of receiving care in a safer setting and lessen needless exposure.

Before the Appointment

If you are able to, try to get in touch with the clinic or medical facility a few days prior to your visit to discuss your accessibility requirements. Describe your condition if you feel comfortable doing so, and inquire about potential accommodations. Reasonable requests could include the following, depending on the facility:

- Booking the first appointment of the day before contaminants, perfumes, or cleaning supplies build up.
- Asking employees who deal with you directly to refrain from using scented personal hygiene products.
- Inquiring about the use of scent-emitting devices or air fresheners in examination areas.
- Waiting for your appointment in your car or outside instead of the waiting area.
- If possible, requesting a room that has been cleaned using the least hazardous materials.
- Verifying the availability of masks, gloves, and other medical supplies devoid of additional scents.

Providing this information ahead gives staff enough time to prepare and can help ease your appointment experience.

Bring MCS-Related Information

Unfortunately, not all medical professionals are knowledgeable about MCS and what their patients might be going through. However, conversations about MCS can be encouraged by providing information.

Consider bringing:

- A short description of your condition and common triggers.
- A list of symptoms you encounter after being exposed.
- Your current supplements and medications.
- Details regarding any accommodations that worked well in other medical appointments or public spaces
- If applicable, emergency contact details.

If symptoms appear during your appointment, having this information in writing can facilitate communication between yourself and the staff, and educate them on the existence of MCS if they weren't already aware.

Plan Ahead

Making a few small logistical choices can help minimize exposure both before and after your appointment. You might want to:

- Make transportation arrangements that eliminate exposure to cleaning supplies and fragrances.
- To help manage symptoms in the event of exposure, bring items advised by your healthcare provider.
- If accommodations take longer than anticipated, plan for additional time.
- If medical visits require a lot of physical exertion, plan time for recovery.

Since everyone's experience is different, your preparation should take into account your unique needs and requirements.

Throughout the Appointment

Notify your doctor right away if you start experiencing symptoms. Effective communication can assist providers in comprehending the situation and figuring out whether any changes need to be made. It might also be beneficial to gently remind employees of any accommodations you requested prior to your visit, if they haven't been fulfilled yet. Inquire about the availability of a different examination room or waiting area if a specific setting is contributing to symptoms.

Know Your Rights

In accordance with relevant human rights laws, healthcare providers across Canada are obligated to provide accessible care and accommodate disabilities to the extent of undue hardship. People with MCS have the right to ask for reasonable accommodations that support fair access to healthcare, even though experiences differ between healthcare settings. It can be hard to speak up for what you need, but asking for accommodations is crucial to making sure that everyone has easy access to healthcare services.

Improving Healthcare Experiences

Taking time to prepare for appointments in advance can make the experience less stressful, but increased awareness about MCS is crucial to create long-term change across the healthcare system. Safer environments can be created for all patients by spreading the word among medical professionals, implementing fragrance-free practices, enhancing indoor air quality, and creating clear accommodation protocols. We can't create change overnight, but we can do our best to contribute to more inclusive healthcare spaces for all.