
Heating Season and Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS): Reducing Indoor Air Pollutants

As the fall season is upon us, it is normal that people tend to spend more time indoors with doors and windows closed and their heating systems on. This keeps houses warm, but it can also lead to less ventilation and the buildup of pollutants. These changes can make it more difficult for people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) to maintain their health, feel comfortable, and engage in daily activities.

Heating systems, dust, mould, fragrances, cleaning supplies, building materials, smoke, and combustion appliances are just a few of the many sources of indoor air pollution. Reducing exposures and promoting a healthier, more accessible indoor environment can be achieved by getting ready for the colder seasons.

Carefully Prepare Your Heating Systems.

During the warmer months, dust and other particles can accumulate in heating systems. These pollutants can move throughout the indoors when the heat is turned on. Before using a heating system regularly, make sure to:

- Schedule maintenance and inspections, if necessary
- Clean baseboard heaters, radiators, and vents using products that household members can tolerate
- Replace or clean the furnace filters
- Request that service providers refrain from using air fresheners, deodorizers, fragrances, and unnecessary chemical treatments
- Whenever possible, schedule maintenance when the person with MCS is away from the immediate area and allow the space to air out before they return.

Make sure that the new filter is compatible with the heating system. Overly restrictive filters can affect airflow or have an impact on system performance.

Reduce Dust Without Adding Fragrance

Dust, pet dander, and other particles can accumulate in closed indoor spaces. Frequent cleaning might be beneficial, but fragrances and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) found in many traditional cleaning products can increase exposure. Use lowest-emission, fragrance-free products that are known to be safe. Particle redistribution into the air may be avoided by using a well-maintained HEPA-filtered vacuum and damp dusting. Steer clear of scented sprays, plug-ins, candles, incense, essential oils, and fragranced laundry products; instead of improving indoor air quality, these can introduce more pollutants.

Maintain Safe Ventilation

Ventilation is still crucial even in colder climates. Briefly opening windows can help exchange stale indoor air without significantly cooling the house, provided that the weather and outdoor air quality allow it. Outdoor exhaust fans for kitchens and bathrooms can also aid in eliminating pollutants and moisture at their source. The manufacturer's recommendations should be followed when maintaining mechanical ventilation systems. Air intakes, vents, and filters should all be kept tidy and clear of obstructions.

Keep an Eye on Mould and Moisture

Moisture may still gather around windows, outside walls, basements, and other cooler places even though heating can make the air inside feel dry. While extremely dry air can irritate the skin, eyes, and respiratory system, too much moisture can encourage mould growth. Promptly address visible mould, leaks, and water damage using strategies that shield the person living with MCS from contaminants and remediation materials. To stop mould or bacteria from growing and spreading, a humidifier should be cleaned on a regular basis.

Make Safe Use of Combustion Appliances

Carbon monoxide and other pollutants can be released from fuel-burning furnaces, fireplaces, wood stoves, and gas appliances if they are not installed, vented, or maintained correctly. Arrange qualified inspections of combustion appliances, and make sure carbon monoxide

alarms are installed and working. Never heat an interior space using an outdoor heater, oven, portable generator, or barbecue. For people with MCS, smoke from tobacco, cannabis, fireplaces, and wood-burning appliances can also spread between rooms and nearby apartments, posing serious accessibility challenges.

Carefully Select Air Cleaners

While some airborne particles may be reduced by portable air cleaners, not all pollutants are eliminated by them. Product components, replacement filters, and maintenance needs should all be carefully taken into account. Steer clear of gadgets that purposefully release fragrances or produce ozone because these can deteriorate indoor air quality. Air cleaning is best used in conjunction with source control, sufficient ventilation, fragrance-free practices, and appropriate building maintenance, not in place of them.

Make a Plan for the Heating Season

Each individual with MCS has unique needs, tolerances, and sensitivities. Safe products, preferred cleaning techniques, heating system maintenance schedules, and actions to take in the event of an exposure can all be found in a household plan. Residents of shared buildings may also need to discuss maintenance tasks, renovations, pest control treatments, fragrances, and smoke with landlords, property managers, or neighbours.

Improving indoor air quality is more than just a comfort issue. Reducing indoor pollutants is a crucial component of accessibility and inclusion for people with MCS. Throughout the heating season, indoor spaces can be made safer and more comfortable with careful planning, source control, fragrance-free practices, adequate ventilation, and routine maintenance.