

## **Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, Part II**

By Heidi Hawkins, MAc, LAc

People with multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) often have a sense of hopelessness about the possibility of recovery. When you consider the folly of mainstream medicine treating a person who is highly reactive to chemicals with medications that are themselves chemicals, it's easy to see how people get that impression. "Untreatable" and "psychosomatic" are familiar words to people with MCS. Of course TCM has something to offer, as do other forms of natural medicine. My findings, however, have led me to realize that treating MCS requires accuracy and specificity beyond what many practitioners are prepared to deliver.

### **First, Do No Harm**

It is highly likely that people with MCS may react negatively to treatment. They are often suffering from deeply entrenched deficiencies as well as severe stagnation. It is important to understand that people with MCS react to levels of chemicals that pass unnoticed to most people. They can easily react to metal and impurities in or on acupuncture needles, and moxa smoke lingering in the office. They are very likely to react to perfume, cologne, hairspray or other scented products if the practitioner is wearing these, or if a previous client left a cloud of perfume in her wake. People with MCS often have plenty of food allergies as well, meaning they may well be allergic to herbs themselves (or quickly become so). Many herbal products have toxic chemicals on them, such as pesticides. Any supplement runs the hazard of containing chemical pollutants, especially if it is packaged in plastic bottles, which invariably off-gas toxins into the product. Energetic testing methods are extremely useful for checking herbal formulae or supplements prior to dispensing them to a chemically sensitive person. (Please see "Allergies and Medical Divination" in the October 2000 issue.)

### **Less Is More**

Treating people with MCS requires the understanding that what works for everyone else may not work for this client. A patient with MCS may be highly sensitive to needles. Treating with fewer points and less invasive techniques is often the most successful method. I do not use Japanese style acupuncture techniques in my practice, but I imagine that the more subtle techniques of some Japanese-style approaches would also be a good choice for a practitioner who is skilled in that area. In my experience, I have found medical *qi gong* and allergy relief systems to be the most successful. Neither of these treatments requires needles, moxa or herbs, but instead involves working very directly with a person's *qi*, blood, fluids, organs and *yin/yang* balance, as well as directly treating toxicity and other imbalances.

### **Treatment and Detox**

Toxicity is inherent in people with MCS. People do not become chemically sensitive until their bodies are overwhelmed with toxins. MCS is a survival mechanism. If people become violently ill whenever exposed to something, they will do their best to avoid that substance if they are able to determine what it is they are reacting to. MCS is the body's last-ditch effort to stave off more exposure to toxins.

Stimulating detoxification in such a person can be extremely hazardous. Utmost caution with the most refined treatment is required. The smallest thing can set off people with MCS. The chemically sensitive have essentially lost the ability to detoxify their systems, due to the extensive damage particularly to the liver, as well as the kidneys. They desperately need to detoxify, but of course, react severely if they do. It is also important not to ignore emotional factors in people with chemical sensitivities. Everywhere they go and everything they do contains a potential threat to their health. The stress is immense. Add to this the probability that they have already been to a myriad of health practitioners who misdiagnose them, refuse to believe them, or treat them as if they are overreacting or exaggerating their problems. These people have usually already had a variety of treatments that don't work, help little, or make them worse. Their trust in practitioners is compromised, and they are often at their wit's end. Many people with MCS simply accept the prevailing belief that their problems are untreatable and learn to live with it through a lifestyle dependent upon the near-impossible task of total avoidance. Hopelessness prevails.

A skilled practitioner can offer hope to people with MCS. Detoxifying such a client requires proceeding slowly and carefully, but it must be done. They cannot recover without detoxifying the chemicals that are overwhelming them. It is also especially important to heal the liver as it clears out chemicals.

## **The Big Picture**

It is important to recognize that none of us are safe from MCS. People who are sick now are the canaries in the coalmine, but we are all in that same mine. There is an element of sacrifice on the spiritual level, of willingness to be a wake-up call for all of humanity. People with MCS often feel like victims of a world out of control. We are all spiritual beings, and as a society, we have been separate from nature for too long. Working against nature must ultimately fail, and the chemically sensitive among us are shattering the myth of "better living through chemistry."

It is time for the human race to take the next step on our evolutionary path. We must learn how to live in the cesspool we have collectively created and learn how to stop destroying our environment. We must evolve our technologies to work in harmony with nature, with the goal of total sustainability. Implied in this evolution is the evolution of medical technology itself: working with the inherent flexibility of traditional Chinese medicine, remaining true to the intent and history of TCM without dogmatic adherence to ways that do not serve us at this time. The spiritual and intuitive tradition of Taoist TCM is highly sustainable, and is the most in need of reviving. This is our future, our children's future, and the future of our sacred planet. The chemically sensitive challenge us as practitioners to refine our technique for the future.

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