

Too Much Fresh Air

By John Schwindt

The following insightful story was published in the New Mexico MCS support group's newsletter Ecolife in 1988

Keywords: chemical sensitivity, MCS, masking, unmasking, history

Several years ago I was trying to explain environmental illness to Dr. Nakamae, a professor of electrical engineering at Hiroshima University. He had been my host when I taught there in 1976, and he couldn't understand why I was no longer able to work. He listened carefully as I explained that I had become sensitive to several kinds of air pollution, especially indoors. When I finished, he thought about it for a while and then said, "Your problem, Dr. Schwindt, is that you have too much fresh air!"

At the time I thought he was being funny, blaming the fresh air for what had been caused by exposure to toxic chemicals. Now I'm not so sure he wasn't serious, because since then many other people familiar with E.I. have told me the same thing in different words. "You have become too unmasked," they say. "You would be better if you didn't live in such a remote place and didn't remove so many things from your home." "You need to stay masked," they tell me, "so you can cope better with day to day exposures. Too much fresh air will make you worse, because you'll lose your tolerance."

Since this advice usually comes from well-meaning people, I've thought a lot about it, but I still can't buy it. I think blaming fresh air is roughly equivalent to shooting the messenger who brings you bad news. It's analogous to blaming abstinence for the withdrawal symptoms we experience when we stop smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, or using sweeteners. Fresh air and avoidance don't cause E.I. symptoms, they merely "unmask" or reveal the damage that has been caused by a lifetime of living in a polluted environment. The withdrawal symptoms from tobacco, alcohol and sugars often continue for several months, and for that period we generally feel worse than before we quit, until our bodies recover from the effects of the abuse. The withdrawal symptoms indicate that it really wasn't such a good idea to develop a tolerance for these things, because the tolerance only masked the cumulative damage going on. The first cigarette, the first sip of scotch, or the first glazed donut could have told us that, but we usually aren't paying attention when we are young and immortal. Only after we unmask

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and give up our tolerance can we appraise the real effect of these things on our health.

I continue to believe that it is therapeutic to withdraw from a polluted chemical environment and to endure the withdrawal symptoms (unmasking and unloading) in order to emerge stronger and healthier on the other side. I believe we need to do this to give our immune systems the opportunity to recover. Some say No, don't withdraw, it's better for your immune system to be challenged by daily exposures. But I can't recall a day in my adult life, not even in the wilderness, when my immune system wasn't challenged – by pollens, molds, foods, fabrics, bedding, dust, papers, cooking fumes, not to mention the unseen viruses and bacteria we always carry with us. We are always being challenged by the environment, even in so-called protected environments.

Of course, I don't recommend unmasking for everyone. In fact, I don't recommend it for anyone. If you can live in your usual environment without being sick, then fine, continue living there. Being masked is OK for those healthy enough to do it. On the other hand, those with chronic illnesses such as colds, infections, asthma, herpes, candidiasis, EBV [Epstein-Barr Virus, ed.], colitis, and other chronic symptoms, these people may want to consider trying a cleaner, safer environment to see if unmasking will help them toward better health.

In the end, those who need more fresh air will do what they have to do to find it, and those who don't need it will continue doing what they are doing. That's as it should be. But let's not blame fresh air for the symptoms and problems caused by a lifetime of chemical exposures. Unmasking can be painful and unpleasant, for it often brings the unwelcome news that we are sensitive to more things than we had supposed. But in this case the bad news is good news, for it is exactly the information we need to proceed toward better health. Unmasking to identify those things causing our chronic illnesses is the first step toward overcoming these illnesses. Such knowledge is power, the truth that may set us free

So I'll take my chances with fresh air. It smells good, tastes good, and feels good, and works for me better than any other remedy or therapy.

More MCS history

See www.eiwellspring.org/history.html