Environmental Illness

Living in today's world causes us to be continuously assaulted by chemicals in the environment that affect our bodies in a cumulative and negative way. More than 1,000 chemicals are added to food that is not organic, and several hundred show up in our drinking water. In addition, there are toxic chemicals in auto exhaust, carpet, flooring, clothing, and cleaning and laundry supplies, particularly fabric softeners. These chemicals show up in adipose tissue, the liver, breast milk, and blood plasma.

Environmental illness is characterized by a multitude of complaints, both physical and psychological, seemingly triggered by the accumulation of these toxic substances in the body. One exposure does not immediately lead to symptoms, as we have detoxification systems that usually are able to take care of these chemicals. But accumulation of such exposures eventually may lead to a total breakdown in which the body is no longer capable of protecting us. Initial symptoms include fatigue and weakness, which eventually lead to poor memory, sleep disorders, brain fog, headaches, and depression, just to name a few.

Sometimes a yeast overgrowth (Candida) is a connection that complicates recovery. When the yeast is treated, sensitivities to the environment often improve. Other areas to consider are sluggish liver detoxification, zinc deficiency, allergies to food, mold, or dust, and overload of heavy metals, such as mercury, lead, cadmium, arsenic, and aluminum.

As chemical exposure increases, sensitivity to the environment increases dramatically, and intolerance to many foods and chemicals worsens (see ***Environmental Sensitivity Questionnaire***). New carpeting or moving into a new house with many chemicals is often the cumulative insult that triggers the beginning of environmental illness. Workers in many industries are particularly prone to overexposure of these chemicals. Painters, hairdressers and nail stylists, farmers, welders, and artists are just some of the professions that are more likely to cause environmental illness.

Minimizing indoor chemical pollution is helpful in preventing the development of environmental illness. This may include removal of any household products that emits vapors: paints, solvents, scented soap and laundry products, polishes, lawn and garden chemicals, air fresheners, cosmetics, and anything that has an odor. Nontoxic alternatives are available in health food stores or online.

Doctors who specialize in environmental illness will look at the immune system, taking a careful history of nutritional status, particularly food allergies and sensitivities, chemical sensitivities, and autoimmune issues.

See ***General Suggestions for Reducing Toxicity and Harmful Chemical Exposures*** for more information.