
Why Environmental Exposures Matter for Heart Health

February is Heart Health Month, a time to reflect on the many factors that influence cardiovascular health. While diet, physical activity, and genetics are often emphasized, environmental exposures play a critical, and frequently overlooked, role in heart health. For people living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), these exposures can have particularly serious consequences.

The Environmental–Heart Health Connection

The heart and vascular system are highly sensitive to environmental stressors. Long-term or repeated exposure to certain chemicals and pollutants can trigger inflammation, oxidative stress, and changes in blood pressure and heart rhythm. Research increasingly links environmental exposures to higher risks of heart disease, stroke, and hypertension.

Common environmental contributors include:

- Air pollution, such as fine particulate matter from traffic and industry
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) released from paints, cleaning products, fragrances, and building materials
- Pesticides and industrial chemicals found in workplaces, schools, and public spaces

These exposures do not affect everyone equally. People with pre-existing health conditions, or multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), may experience more pronounced cardiovascular impacts.

MCS and Cardiovascular Stress

While symptoms vary, many people with MCS report cardiovascular effects, including:

- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Chest tightness
- Blood pressure changes
- Dizziness or faintness

For individuals with MCS, chemical exposures can place the body in a constant state of physiological stress. Repeated activation of the nervous and cardiovascular systems may, over time, contribute to heart strain and reduced overall well-being (Steinemann, 2018).

Indoor Environments Matter

Canadians spend the majority of their time indoors, making indoor air quality especially important for heart health. Scented products, off-gassing materials, and inadequate ventilation can lead to sustained chemical exposure, often without awareness.

Creating fragrance-free and the lowest VOC emission environments through product choice is not only an accessibility issue for people with MCS; it is a heart-healthy choice for everyone. Cleaner indoor air can reduce inflammation, support cardiovascular function, and promote healthier communities.

Prevention Through Environmental Action

Protecting heart health requires looking beyond individual behaviour to the environments we share. Key prevention strategies include:

- Supporting fragrance-free, scent-aware policies and the use of least toxic products in workplaces and public spaces



- Improving ventilation and indoor air quality standards
- Reducing reliance on toxic chemicals in consumer products
- Prioritizing environmental health in public health planning

By addressing environmental exposures, we can help reduce cardiovascular risk and improve quality of life, especially for those most vulnerable.

A Heart-Healthy Future Includes Environmental Health

Heart health is deeply connected to environmental health. Recognizing and reducing harmful exposures is an essential step toward preventing disease, promoting equity, and supporting people living with MCS. This Heart Health Month, let's broaden the conversation and advocate for healthier environments that allow everyone's heart to thrive.

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