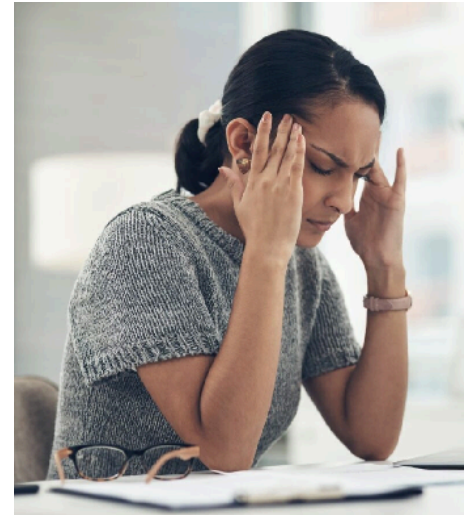


## What People Get Wrong About Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)

Multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) is a recognized disability where more than one million Canadians have a diagnosis — yet it remains widely misunderstood.

These misunderstandings are not harmless. They can lead to dismissal, stigma, and reduced access to essential spaces such as healthcare, workplaces, and housing.



### Did You Know?

- More than **1.13 million Canadians** — approximately **1 in 34** — report a diagnosis of MCS
- MCS has been tracked in Canadian population health data since 2000
- MCS can affect multiple body systems, including neurological and respiratory systems
- Environmental exposures play a central role in triggering symptoms

Source: Robins et al., 2026

### Misconception #1: “It’s a preference”

MCS is not a dislike of scents.

It is a chronic condition in which exposure to even low levels of chemicals — including those found in perfumes, cleaning products, pesticides, and building materials — can trigger significant symptoms.

These may include headaches, dizziness, breathing difficulties, cognitive challenges, fatigue, and nausea. Even brief exposures can have serious effects for some individuals.

## Misconception #2: “It’s just allergies”

Although some symptoms may resemble allergies, MCS is not a typical allergic reaction.

Allergies involve a specific immune response to a particular substance. MCS involves reproducible symptoms triggered by chemical exposures and can affect multiple body systems.

## Misconception #3: “It’s psychological”

One of the most harmful myths is that MCS is “all in your head.”

National data show otherwise. MCS has been documented in Canadian population health surveys for over two decades, with recent analysis confirming its prevalence and impact.

Dismissing MCS can prevent individuals from receiving appropriate support and accommodations.

## Misconception #4: “Avoidance is unrealistic”



Managing exposures, such as choosing appropriate products that are fragrance-free, lowest-emission and least-toxic, is one of the most effective ways people with MCS can manage symptoms.

The challenge is not that avoidance is unrealistic — it is that many environments are not designed with accessibility in mind.

For many living with MCS, source control can determine whether a space is accessible.