

## Fragrance-Free Environments and No-Fragrance Spaces

You may have been given this brochure by a friend, co-worker, relative, or professional who is trying to explain the need to avoid exposure to scented products. If so, this person probably is environmentally ill (EI) or is trying to protect the health of others who are EI. Someone who is EI (for instance, as a result of chemical injuries caused by pesticides or solvents) can be harmed by exposure to common chemicals, including the chemicals found in aftershave, perfume, scented hair products, and scented cosmetics, lotions, powders, and soaps. A person who is EI not only needs to avoid personal use of scented products but also needs to avoid other people who use such products and places that have picked up their smells.

This brochure is written with your situation in mind. It's understandable that you may feel puzzled, annoyed, hurt, intimidated, or even vaguely insulted by a request to leave off the scented stuff when you're going to be around a certain person or going to be in a certain space. How are you supposed to understand this request when you've never had it explained to you before. Here's your chance to understand--and to protect your own health at the same time.

**It's Not the Smell, It's the Chemical** - The problem with scented products is not so much the smell itself as the chemicals that produce the smell. Nearly all scented products currently on the market are made largely or entirely of synthetic chemicals, usually derived from petroleum or coal tar. Nearly one-third of the chemical additives used in perfumes and other scented products are known to be toxic. Just one perfume can contain more than 500 chemicals. Expensive products are just as likely as cheap ones to contain synthetic chemicals. Words like "hypoallergenic," "natural scent," "floral," and the names of various flowers don't mean that you can trust the product under the label--they just mean that the manufacturer wants you to think that the product is safe. Even "unscented" may actually mean that a masking fragrance has been added to the product to disguise the smell of certain ingredients

The only safe assumption about scented products is that they contain numerous toxic chemicals which constantly vaporize into the air and attach themselves to the hair, clothing, and surroundings of anyone who wears them these chemicals are skin irritants, suffocants, eye and respiratory tract irritants, and neurotoxins. That's why being around someone who's wearing a scented product (or who's wearing clothes that have picked up smells from past use of scented products) can cause an EI person to develop obvious allergy symptoms, (sneezing, coughing, watery eyes), to have an asthma attack, to develop a headache, to become dizzy or nauseous, to have trouble focusing or thinking or remembering, to experience sudden mood changes, to develop muscle cramps or spinal subluxations, or even to have a seizure or lose consciousness.

**It's Not About You** - Wearing scented products isn't just a personal choice. It's a choice to impact the air space of others--and in ways you may not be able to predict or control. Knowing that the problem with scented products is the chemicals they contain may help you understand that a request to avoid such products is not a statement about you. An EI person is not trying to insult your taste.

**Yes, It's for Real, and It's Widespread** - Perhaps you're worried that someone is putting you on, or you wonder if the EI person's problem may be "all in the head," or maybe you assume that EI is a rare condition. Actually, EI is widespread--and rapidly increasing. Twenty to thirty percent of the U.S. population has physical reactions to one or more types of synthetic substances. Unfortunately, EI people may go undiagnosed, or their problem may be improperly diagnosed as psychological in origin because these reactions to chemicals often are delayed and aren't something that physicians are taught to recognize.

Anyone can become EI, because anyone's natural detoxification mechanisms can break down as the result of chemical overload--and such an overload can result from repeated, "low-level" chemical exposures. Athletes, children, business people, scientists, farm and factory workers, teachers--anyone can become EI. No one is immune.

**How It May Be About You, After All** - Like everyone else in this country, you're continually exposed to a barrage of chemicals. So why increase the chance of becoming EI by putting toxic chemicals on yourself? When you wear scented products, you breathe in those chemicals all day long, and they're also absorbed through your skin. Just because you can't smell the product after a while doesn't mean that it's worn off. It's just that your nose is worn out and has shut down in self-protection. But that doesn't keep the chemicals from continuing to enter your body through your lungs or skin.

In fact, becoming insensitive to the smell of scented products is a common warning sign that EI is developing. Unfortunately, scented-product users generally aren't aware that they are losing their sense of smell until they start using so much of the products that other people begin making comments or moving away from them. If you want to learn more about the manifestations of EI so that you can better protect your health, see the book by Randolph and Moss that's listed at the end of this brochure.

If it still seems incredible that toxic chemicals are in the scented products you use--or that even trace amounts of those chemicals can harm the people around you - remember that manufacturers aren't in the business of giving people the whole story. Even ten years ago the idea that second-hand cigarette smoke could be harmful was just beginning to reach the public. And it's taken even longer for the public to learn that many other things besides tobacco are put into cigarettes, But what we don't know can hurt us.

Choose to know. Be aware, for your own protection and the protection of those around you.

### For More Information:

**Dodd, Debra Lynn.** Nontoxic, Natural and Earthwise: How to Protect Yourself and Your Family from Harmful Products and Live in Harmony with the Earth. New York: Putnam, 1990.

**Lawson, Lynn.** Staying Well in a Toxic World: Understanding Environmental Illness, Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, chemical Injuries, and Sick Building Syndrome. Chicago: Noble Press, 1993.

**Randolph, Theron G., and Ralph W. Moss.** An Alternative Approach to Allergies: The New Field of Clinical Ecology Unravels the Environmental Causes of Mental and Physical Ills, revised ed. New Your: Harper and Row, 1989

copyright 1996 by Roberta K. Rigsby, Ph.D. All Rights Reserved.

This brochure may be duplicated in part or whole by any means without the written permission of the author.