When I was ill, I would have given almost anything for someone to hand me a list of things I could do that might help me to identify the cause of my symptoms and to get better. Despite my conviction that my symptoms had to be related to my immediate environment, there was no support and no concrete suggestion of how I could track down the cause. The information was out there, but it was all spread out in bits and pieces; putting it together into a usable format was daunting. Like so many of my fellow sufferers, I was ready to look to expensive promises of cures and remedies, but then I discovered that there were things I could do that cost almost nothing except effort.

If you look around you at the moment, you may find that several demands are being made on your body by chemicals and EMFs. You may be wearing a polyester sweat shirt, drinking a steaming cup of coffee, while sitting in an overstuffed chair talking on a cell phone. We take these things for granted; we don’t even realize that they are sources of chemicals and EMFs that place a burden on our bodies.

The chemicals around us enter our bodies not only from the food we eat but also from the air we breathe, the clothes we wear, the water we drink and bathe in, and the cosmetics and toiletries that come into contact with our skin. Once inside our bodies, they cause damage. Nature has put mechanisms in place to prevent this damage—for instance, it provides us with melatonin and a blood brain barrier. Melatonin protects us by neutralizing the free radicals that chemicals create in our bodies, and the blood brain barrier protects us by preventing chemicals from passing into the brain and spinal cord. Unfortunately, EMFs interfere with both of these protective mechanisms. They reduce the production of melatonin which means there is less of this vital antioxidant available to deal with chemical damage, and they increase the permeability of the blood brain barrier which allows chemicals to flow into the brain and spinal cord. By reducing EMFs, especially at night when melatonin production reaches its peak, and by minimizing the chemical burden that melatonin has to deal with, we can create an environment in which our body’s own mechanisms can restore health.

There are three basic goals to achieve: to identify and avoid the conditions that provoke our symptoms, thereby reducing the drain on our reserves; to remove the electromagnetic fields that hamper our hormones’ ability to repair the damage that chemicals cause; and to create homes where our exposure to chemicals is minimal, giving our bodies a fighting chance to recover from daily exposure to chemicals over which we have no control.

To achieve these goals, I have created eight Simple Steps, outlined in my book The Sick House Survival Guide, that show you how: to recognize the environments that provoke your symptoms through the use of comparison worksheets and a log; to find a place where you can sleep and how to create a sanctuary around it; to reduce your exposure to the chemicals in tap water; to use an elimination diet to isolate foods that burden your system and then reduce their chemical contribution; to limit the burden synthetic fabrics place on your system; to purify your air by eliminating or reducing sources of impurities; to decrease your exposure to electromagnetic fields by considering more than simply maintaining a “safe” distance; and to balance your psychological, physical, and emotional needs.

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Is Your Environment Toxic?
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Electromagnetic fields aren’t fussy about walls, floors, or ceilings; most of them can pass right through. This makes it important to consider your location in relation to both the appliances that you can see and those that you can’t. If you can’t simply unplug or turn off power sources, both hidden and visible, then adjust your position to maximize your distance from them.

Many synthetic fibers deliver their chemicals to our skin as our bodies heat them and cause them to offgas. Substituting cotton sheets, sleepwear, and clothes, washing with unperfumed detergent, eliminating fabric softeners, and using unscented products can significantly impact the frequency of some symptoms.

Sleep is a crucial element to healing and creating a healthy environment. Try using a foam or cotton mattress instead of a coil mattress. There is some suggestion that the coils of a spring mattress channel electromagnetic fields. If you use a foam mattress, be sure to use several layers of cotton sheets between it and you. So often when people are sick, we hear them say something like, “The only place I can sleep is on the recliner in the living room.” When we are sick, our bodies have a way of telling us that they need to sleep and where they would like to do so. When we don’t feel well, we’re inclined to give in to these intuitions, but the rest of the time we force ourselves to sleep in our beds. Our beds are positioned in our bedrooms with esthetics and the rest of the time we force ourselves to sleep in our beds. This avoidance is temporary—just until your body is strong enough to cope.

Avoid any environment that you have identified as provoking your symptoms. By avoiding these environments, you stop using up your reserves which can instead be channeled towards healing. This avoidance is temporary—just until your body is strong enough to cope.

Switch to Natural Cleaners
TO MAKE YOUR HOME LESS TOXIC

Today’s cleaning products are made from an eye-opening number of toxic chemicals. When we use these products in our homes, the chemicals they contain can stay suspended in the air for hours or even days after the product has been used and can easily be inhaled. These chemicals also remain behind as residues on surfaces to which the cleaners have been applied. In this way, they can be easily absorbed through any skin that comes into contact with those surfaces. In addition, when chemicals from different cleaners accidentally come into contact with each other, they sometimes react to form new toxic substances. The results of all this chemical chaos can be deadly.

A 15 year study in Oregon, comparing women who didn’t work outside the home with women who did, found a 54% higher death rate from cancer in the women who stayed at home. The study suggested that chronic exposure to cleaning products played a role. With all these chemicals in our homes, it’s no wonder that the EPA found the air quality in our homes to be 5-10 times more toxic than the air outside, and typically contaminated by anywhere between 20-150 different pollutants in concentrations 10-40 times those outdoors! Much of this pollution comes from petrochemical cleaners.

Cleaners are not required to reveal their ingredients, which are considered “trade secrets.” No one but cleaner manufacturers really know exactly what is in these products. The consumer has little to go on beyond the warnings labels manufacturers are required to put on their products. Though mandated signs like DANGER, WARNING, and CAUTION give us a general idea about the overall seriousness of the unknown substances the products contain, they do little more than that. Furthermore, these warnings only apply to the immediate health effects a product causes and don’t address what really happens when we use these cleaners regularly.

When you buy new cleaning products, look for manufacturers that list their natural ingredients on the label. Purchase cleaners containing non-petroleum-based surfactants, that are chlorine and phosphate free, that claim to be “non-toxic” and that are biodegradable. These products often clean as effectively as their petrochemical counterparts, but don’t pollute your home in the process. Awareness of this issue is growing, and product lines of environmentally sound cleaning products are available in natural foods stores, online, and in many supermarkets.

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