

Woman claims allergy to electricity

Doctor describes condition as electromagnetic and chemical sensitivity

<http://www.gfwadvertiser.ca/index.cfm?sid=78538&sc=291>

SUE HICKEY
08/11/07
(Canada)

What do bee stings, peanut butter, pets and shellfish have in common?

They can make you sick if you're allergic to them.

The enemy known as allergies is a reaction of your immune system to something that does not bother most people. However, people with allergies are often more sensitive to certain foods, perfumes, plants, living things - and even electricity.

That's according to Joanne Leberge, a St. John's woman who was in central Newfoundland this past week visiting a friend.

During her visit, she also wanted to get the word about a condition which she thinks is more common in today's society than most people know about.

It's called electromagnetic sensitivity, or more commonly, electrosensitivity, and if one looks it up on the Internet, a search shows that the 48-year-old is one of a growing section of people who claim to be experiencing an extreme, and in cases like Ms. Leberge's, incapacitating sensitivity to electrical appliances, cell phones, TVs, and many other devices that rely on electromagnetic waves.

The World Wide Web may be a valuable resource in tracking down fellow hyper-electrosensitives, but Ms. Leberge usually has to get someone else to do the grunt work. Surfing the web would mean that she would have to use a computer.

And according to Ms. Leberge, her using a computer is similar to someone having an allergic reaction.

Her story sounds like something straight out of The X-Files, but her symptoms are real.

"My body dehydrates when I'm around all this electricity and I have to make sure I'm hydrated," she explained. "When I was working, it would be worse because I would get nauseated and dehydrated, and through the nose too, flu like symptoms that don't go away but are very intensified.

"My throat, my whole body, swells when I'm around a lot of electricity - like cell phones, Blackberries and Bluetooths - when I'm talking on the phone and it all depends on what's going on in that air in the daytime."

She also says when her electrosensitivity acts up, she gets headaches and a bad taste in her mouth. It mimics a lot of disorders, she added.

A SAFE SPOT

Ms. Leberge lives in St. John's now, after moving from Corner Brook in June.

When she came to visit her friend in Norris Arm, she chose to do so as an experiment to see if there would be a difference going from a city to a small rural area.

She did find a difference, and in St. John's she can now sense electromagnetic waves from cell phone towers 200 metres away. Transformers also affect her when she is walking by them.

Ms. Leberge's condition wasn't always a part of her life. She only started experiencing her electrosensitivity last year - but the condition has hit her with a vengeance.

"I'm a very healthy person but since this has come upon me, I've had so many tests done, that they couldn't find anything. They tried to narrow it down to anxiety or depression.

"You know your body, and when you see all this showing up and your life going downhill and all these symptoms ... it was making me ill enough inside that I was flat on my back. I went to emergency, I went to a naturopath and they got me on the subject of electromagnetic sensitivity. I didn't know what that was."

Ms. Lebarge went back and forth to her doctor and to a nurse and nothing was identified - but she was getting sicker.

"My family and friends knew something was wrong but we couldn't put the pieces together."

Then she did some experiments of her own. She stopped wearing glasses and visited the Corner Brook Gorge, a tourist attraction which is a deep depression carved by Corner Brook Stream. It's also far away from electromagnetic fields.

"It's out of the way of microwaves. I went down for about a week and there was a 50 per cent difference in myself. My health was back up, I was eating normally."

As for her glasses, she says she can't wear them because the frames have metal in them that picks up cell phone waves.

SUPPORT

There are support groups for people like Ms. Lebarge, many of them in Europe. One group that has a Website is ElectroSensitivity-UK (www.electrosensitivity.org.uk), directed at people with the condition, as well as scientists and other members of the public interested in learning more about the effects of electromagnetic fields.

"They are part of the overall background that surrounds us, part of the planet and the same type of energy as ordinary sunlight, whose ultra-violet rays can burn our skin and even cause cancers, but they are invisible to the eye, and have no smell or taste," states the website.

In Ms. Lebarge's case, the effects of electromagnetic fields causes her to feel a tingling on left side of the body, itching, fatigue and insomnia.

"At home too, in March, I was lying down so sick. I had jewellery on. I was quiet, and my parents were there. I heard a beeping noise and I said, 'Mom, what's that,' and she said it was nothing. I lifted my head up and a current hit my bracelet, then it travelled up my arm and hit to the left side. It travelled up twice in about two or three minutes," she explained. "After that, I did research and went to see a power engineer. They explained to me what could be happening and it could be fillings. But afterwards it went into stray currents, that's the build up of electricity into the homes, too much electricity, static electricity of your carpet, appliances in the house and power lines outside the window."

For Ms. Lebarge, her condition means a monastic lifestyle: short trips to grocery stores, virtually no TV, no cell phones, or anything with electromagnetic waves.

"I have to live a secluded life to stay healthy and trying to explain that to someone who doesn't understand, they find it incomprehensible," she said.

"It's surreal but it's real."

She has a note from a St. John's doctor stating that she "has electromagnetic and chemical sensitivity and will require accommodations in single housing in an area of Newfoundland which is a great distance away from power stations and electrical sources."

When contacted on her condition, the doctor didn't want to comment until the results are received from a scheduled MRI planned for Ms. Lebarge.

To contact Ms. Lebarge in relation to electrosensitivity, she can be reached at 738-2683.

Comments:

Sandi Lawrence from Chichester, W Sussex UK writes:
Electro sensitivity and electromagnetic sensitivity is occurring all over the world

and is not a new or surreal thing to those of us in the UK who have experienced it for many years.

Unlike the doctor in your article most UK doctors are not prepared to even think about the possibility of people being affected in this way, so we are alone and without any official help - yet we are breaking new ground for ourselves and can tell the doctors a thing or two!

I have met some wonderful people who are also sensitive to pulsed microwave radiation or electricity or both and we have all found a life with different values and more REAL pleasure despite the deprivation and pain we suffer and all else.

I urge non-sensitive people to research this very real and growing problem as we sensitives at least get a warning and can protect ourselves but they do not.

Parents should also research on behalf of their children as they are more vulnerable and cannot help themselves.

Posted 08/11/2007