

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

The autonomic nervous system is a functional division of the nervous system which controls the automatic or reflexive bodily functions, such as blood pressure, gastrointestinal movement and digestion, urinary function, sweating, body temperature, eye focusing, heart action, the “fight-or-flight” response, blood flow, blood sugar control, the secretions of glands, basal metabolism, lung air flow, uterine tension, fluid and food intake, weight control, and mental activity. The hypothalamus is a region of the brain situated in the lower area which controls the functions of the autonomic nervous system and has connections to other areas of the brain including the cortex.

During the twenty-five years which we have spent treating persons with Chemical Sensitivity Syndromes (a.k.a. Multiple Chemical Sensitivities), it has been apparent that many of the persons so afflicted have variable reactions from exposures to molds and chemicals. Suggestive of dysregulation of autonomic nervous system function, such persons report rather unusual symptoms coming in unsystematic fashion which befuddle the conventional physician who is not able to organize the symptoms into a conventional construct. The conventional physician is unable to understand the patient, and subsequently either disregards or minimizes the symptoms, misinterprets them, or attributes them to a psychiatric or psychological origin. Without a useful construct, the conventional physician is unable to validate the symptoms, investigate the possible causes, and offer ameliorative or palliative care for those patients who often suffer so miserably. The lives of patients suffering from these syndromes are often greatly

compromised by loss of an understanding family, loss of a job and associated health insurance, loss of means of support, and patients can be relegated to a life of poverty, major discomfort and loss of hope of ever achieving significant recovery, comfort, and normalcy. They become the outcasts of our society because the conventional medical model will not put aside its biases and prejudices and carefully consider the patients individuality.

Many of the physicians working in the conventional medical model, unaccustomed to considering holistic or alternative explanations for a patient's unusual symptoms, invoke the reductionistic (narrowly-focused) model used at medical schools and affiliated hospitals. Patients are often hopeful that they will receive superior care at the university medical hospital. This is not always the case in institutions using an older medical model. Often, patients will receive excellent care from their primary care physician who knows them well and trusts them.

The good news is that new tests to define the neurological difficulty in chemically hypersensitive persons are now available and are covered by most insurance plans. This is called "Autonomic Nervous System Testing" ordered by Psychiatrists and Autonomic Neurologists.

Metabolic, toxic, or mechanical injury of autonomic nerve fibers going to an organ may cause decreases in some of the autonomic functions of that organ. If you can answer "yes" to more than half of the questions below you may have an autonomic neuropathy which will help explain the unusual nature of your symptoms. If you have these symptoms and believe you are so afflicted, we will

help you find a competent and knowledgeable physician who will perform the definitive tests. Options for possibly relieving these conditions will be discussed – subsequent to testing.

Autonomic Nervous System Checklist

Have you had any of the following conditions as part of your current difficulty?

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Excessive sweating or difficulty sweating. | YES | NO |
| 2. Flushing or pink/pale patches on the skin. | YES | NO |
| 3. Migraines or vascular headaches. | YES | NO |
| 4. Intermittent blurred vision of unknown cause or light sensitivity;
dry eyes or excessive tears. | YES | NO |
| 5. Nasal blockage off and on. | YES | NO |
| 6. Difficulty swallowing; or dry mouth or excessive saliva;
poor or abnormal taste. | YES | NO |
| 7. Difficulty digesting; stomach acid, heartburn, or Gastroesophageal
reflux disease (GERD); frequent nausea or vomiting. | YES | NO |
| 8. Constipation or recurrent diarrhea. | YES | NO |
| 9. Intestinal spasms or Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). | YES | NO |
| 10. Excessive or unusually infrequent urination; or difficult
bladder control. | YES | NO |
| 11. Difficulty with sexual function. | YES | NO |
| 12. Asthma or other inhalant allergies. | YES | NO |
| 13. Blood pressure unusually or frequently up and/or down. | YES | NO |

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 14. Blood pressure different from one side of body to the other. | YES | NO |
| 15. Erratic heart rate — sometimes fast, sometimes slow. | YES | NO |
| 16. Raynaud's Syndrome; or white/blue finger tips. | YES | NO |
| 17. Heat or cold intolerance; or chilliness. | YES | NO |
| 18. Cold hands and/or feet. | YES | NO |
| 19. Faintness on standing or fainting attacks. | YES | NO |
| 20. Excessive or frequent "fight or flight response." | YES | NO |
| 21. Difficulty keeping body temperature normal. | YES | NO |
| 22. Difficulty controlling dietary intake and controlling weight. | YES | NO |