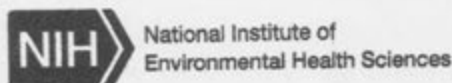


Environmental Factor

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Environmental medicine shows promise for reducing chronic disease

By Robin Macker

At a May 9 seminar, a trio of researchers highlighted how environmental medicine can help reduce leading health problems, including diabetes, obesity, and other chronic diseases.

"Obesity, Electrosensitivity, Mycotoxicosis, and the Clinical Practice of Medicine," hosted by the NIEHS Office of the Director, focused on the role of chemicals, mold, food, electromagnetic energy, and other environmental factors in making people sick, and how removing triggers from a person's environment can improve health. This patient-centered, cause-oriented model for diagnosing, treating, and preventing chronic diseases is known as environmental medicine.

Lisa Nagy, M.D.

(http://www.vineyardpersonalizedmedicine.com/Vineyard_Personalized_Medicine/Welcome_to_Vineyard_Personalized_Medicine.html),

director of the Environmental Health Center of Martha's Vineyard, shared her personal story of surviving multiple chemical sensitivities and discussed her work teaching, practicing, and advocating for environmental medicine.

Magda Havas, Ph.D. (<http://www.magdahavas.com/>), from Trent University in Ontario, and William Meggs, M.D., Ph.D. (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-dhs/ecuem/fac/meggs_w.cfm), from East Carolina University, presented specific examples from their own practices.

Environmental triggers to chronic diseases

"I practice emergency medicine and get a ringside seat to what is really going on in the medical world," Meggs said in the first presentation. He noted that increases in suicide attempts, diabetes, and obesity rates were health problems that may be related to environmental factors.

Meggs said that one-third of the U.S. population is obese, and something needs to be done to address this significant public health threat. He indicated that one way to accomplish this would be to limit exposure to environmental chemicals.

Discussing the differences between the two approaches he practices — conventional and environmental medicine — Meggs said both have value, but an environmental approach, in which the focus is on taking away things that are shown to cause harm, may be more beneficial for certain health concerns. Factors besides chemicals, such as nutrition and genetics, also play a role, he said.



NIEHS and National Toxicology Program (NTP) Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., left, introduced Nagy at the seminar on environmental medicine. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Meggs said diet can help reduce inflammation and risk of related diseases. He has even co-authored a [cookbook](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-admin/news/cookbook14.cfm) (<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-admin/news/cookbook14.cfm>) on the topic. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Electrohypersensitivity

Havas has dedicated much of her career to researching and teaching about the impact of chemicals, electricity, and wireless devices on human health, wildlife, and nature. She presented case studies to illustrate the health benefits of removing or reducing electromagnetic fields in a person's day-to-day environment.

Havas showed a short video of a person with multiple sclerosis. Hand control improved after a filter to block intermediate frequencies was installed on the plasma TV in the individual's home. In another example, a diabetic individual experienced a higher decrease in blood sugar from running outside compared with running on an electronic treadmill. Havas asserted that the electromagnetic field of the treadmill made the difference.

"This is all good news," she said. "If you reduce your exposure, you can actually recover." She listed simple steps to reducing electromagnetic fields exposures, such as not carrying mobile phones in shirt or pants pockets, but rather keeping devices away from the body.

Linked Video



[Watch Havas discuss the connections between multiple sclerosis and electrosensitivity in this video from her website. \(5:41\)](#)

(Launches in a new window) 

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdtlPb3Veuw>

Mold exposures and environmental medicine

Nagy, who serves as the government liaison for the [American Academy of Environmental Medicine](https://www.aeonline.org/) (<https://www.aeonline.org/>), closed the seminar by focusing on the role of mold and other environmental factors in illnesses and chemical sensitivity.

She shared her own journey of finding a solution to the chemical and electrical sensitivity she developed after living in a house that had mold. Nagy said molds can produce measurable toxins, and some of these mycotoxins can harm the body, including, as in her case, the adrenal system.

As a physician, Nagy stressed the importance of listening to patients to discover the underlying cause of their problem. "Environmental medicine is a comprehensive approach that deals with all aspects of why we get sick," she said. "People need to know that an environmental medicine approach is available as a treatment option."

(Robin Mackar is the news director in the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison and a frequent contributor to the Environmental Factor.)



Havas ended her talk by playing a catchy music video to teach teens about ways to protect their bodies from electronic devices. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



From left, NTP Associate Director John Bucher, Ph.D.; Katie Pelch, Ph.D.; Julie Rice; Windy Boyd, Ph.D.; and Dori Germolec, Ph.D., all from NTP, as well as NTP contractor Marjolein Smith, Ph.D., attended in person. The seminar was also webcast. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)