

Q & A

The Difference Between Chemical Allergy and Chemical Toxicity

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Q: What is the difference between a chemical allergy and a chemical toxicity?

A: An allergy produces hay fever like symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, itching, nasal stuffiness, watering eyes, wheezing, and coughing. Allergy symptoms are generally regarded as different degrees of a nuisance. The symptoms are usually easily observable by a physician and therefore are easily accepted and diagnosed. Diagnosis can be confirmed with typical allergy tests for elevated immunoglobulin E (IgE).

The symptoms of chemical toxicity are typically neurological and include headache, extreme fatigue, dizziness, weakness, nausea, disorientation, memory problems, slowed reaction time, peripheral neuropathy, sensory neuropathy, and personality/mood changes. Other symptoms may include respiratory difficulty, rash, burning sensations in the nose and mouth, and gastrointestinal disorders. Serious toxicity may result in impaired speech, seizures, stroke, and paralysis.

Chemical toxicity is not regarded as a nuisance, but rather a major life-altering crisis. Victims of toxicity will take extreme measures to avoid further exposure to substances which add to their toxic load and produce a multitude of symptoms as a result of toxicity induced cellular inflammation, nutritional deficiencies, malabsorption, and impaired detoxification.

The symptoms of toxicity are not easily observable by a physician and often seem vague and subjective as reported by the patient. The extreme measures taken to avoid further exposure often seem out of proportion to the person's otherwise normal appearance and may lead to an incorrect conclusion that the person is psychotic, paranoid, or anxious.

Diagnosis is initially difficult unless the patient was poisoned on the job or has had a sudden acute exposure to a known toxic substance. Patients suffering from chronic low-level exposure to a toxic substance may not even be aware of the substance that has made them ill. Instead they may report illness when in a certain building or exposed to certain chemicals.

Typically chronic low-level poisoning cases include chronic environmental pesticide, mold, or formaldehyde exposure in the home or workplace.

Typical allergy treatments such as antihistamines and provocative neutralization don't reduce the symptoms of toxicity. In fact, since the body is already toxic, antihistamines and other drugs often add to body burden and make the symptoms worse.

Through identifying and ceasing the source of exposure and treating the physical damage caused by the toxicant, symptoms from toxicity can be reduced and/or eliminated. A physician specializing in this area is recommended.