

Are Heavy Metals or Environmental Toxins Making You Sick?

by Bernarda Zenker, M.D.



Do you not feel well, but doctors cannot find the reason or problem? Do you have overwhelming fatigue, suffer from psychological or neurological problems, but medications do not give the desired relief? Or have you suddenly realized that your memory or concentration is rapidly deteriorating, without a known cause? These symptoms, and multiple other symptoms, could be caused by heavy metal or environmental toxicity. When clinical medical tests repeatedly return as “negative,” begin to question if heavy metal or environmental toxins could be causing the illness.

Metals become toxic when they accumulate within the body, and are unable to be efficiently metabolized and removed from the body. Heavy metals that are toxic to the body can come from the food we eat, the air that we breathe, the water and fluids we drink, medications, dental fillings, and can even be absorbed through the skin. Frequently, when least expected, heavy metals are being absorbed—and are a threat. For example, inhalation is the most frequent cause of exposure to mercury. Arsenic can be found in water supplies, worldwide, leading to toxic accumulation in cultivated fish farming of shellfish, cod, and haddock.

The more common metals leading to toxicity include antimony, arsenic, bismuth, cadmium, iron, lead, mercury, nickel, tin, uranium, aluminum, and zinc. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has identified arsenic, lead, mercury, and cadmium among the “Top 20 Hazardous Substances.” Chlorinated pesticides and polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) are stored in fatty tissue and accumulate over a patient’s lifetime.

Chemical exposure in our working and living environments can lead to toxic levels. These, for example, could include cleaning chemicals or insect spray pesticides.”

When Toxins Accumulate, Problems Can Occur.

- Heavy metal toxicity can lead to hormonal imbalance, immune system dysfunction, poor healing, and nerve and brain damage. Fatigue, muscle pain, and digestive problems can all occur.
- Mercury toxicity, for example has been associated with extreme panic, and bipolar disorders.
- Copper toxicity has been found with some patients who suffer with schizophrenia.
- Multiple metals can damage vital organs of the lungs, kidneys, and liver. Chronic, heavy metal exposure has often preceded progressive physical, muscular, and neurological degenerative processes that can mimic Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophy, and multiple sclerosis. Psychomotor and behavioral problems, allergies, obesity, fatigue, and even some cancers have all been problems that accompany PCB accumulation.
- Chlorinated pesticides are thought to cause multiple illnesses, including allergies, asthma, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Chronic exposure to volatile solvents has been associated with blood disorders, muscular weakness and atrophy.
- Diabetes, fibromyalgia, brain fog, and mood disorders have also been observed following chronic exposure to volatile solvents.

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Laboratory evaluation can be done to assess and monitor for heavy metal and environmental toxins. These tests, however, are not usually performed in a health clinician's office unless sought and requested, as special test kits are required. The cost of some of the available testing is covered by some health insurance plans when ordered by a qualified licensed health practitioner. Different tests may give information reflecting different exposure and body toxicity:

- **An Elemental Hair Analysis** - can provide information on a broader range of heavy metal toxicities than blood testing, including uranium and barium. An elemental hair analysis provides information of exposure during the previous 1-2 years.
- **Provoked Urine Heavy Metal Challenge Test** - involves taking a drug that binds to heavy metals that are then urinated out the body, collected, and metal levels are measured.
- **Packed Erythrocytes Elemental Analysis** - measures RBC intracellular concentrations of toxic elements. This is an ideal test for patients suspected of recent toxic exposure and for evaluation of intracellular metal.
- **Blood Profiles for Chlorinated Pesticides, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) and Volatile Solvents** - tests for bioaccumulation in fatty tissues.

Heavy metal toxicity requires prompt professional medical attention. There are, however, beneficial and supportive measures of good health that support the natural chelation mechanisms of the body. Many herbs and supplements have natural chelating characteristics and properties that help to

detoxify the body. Cilantro is well known for detoxification, and garlic can protect from various pollutants and heavy metals. Green tea is a powerful antioxidant that seems to protect cells from mutation. Chlorella is a fresh-water algae that has been accepted as a detoxifier, and it is commonly used in colon-cleansing regimes. Chlorella appears to bind to heavy metals as well as other toxic substances in the bowel and helps with the detoxification process. N-Acetyl-Cysteine is a nutritional supplement that supports the formation in the liver of glutathione, the body's master anti-oxidant that aids in free-radical scavenging, immune boosting and detoxification of toxins. Alpha Lipoic Acid is also a nutritional anti-oxidant that is helpful for removing mercury and cadmium. Eat organic foods whenever possible. Drink filtered water.

Important supplements to consider are antioxidants, herbs, minerals, essential amino acids, phytonutrients, detoxifying agents, protective agents, and diets high in fiber. As toxins move from the tissues into the blood stream, the toxins are reprocessed through the liver and bile, and then released into the intestines. Fiber in the intestines can help to trap toxins in the bowel, and prevent reabsorption. Toxins can be mobilized and eliminated in urine, stool and sweat. Stay well hydrated to facilitate elimination.

Please consult your primary care provider prior to starting any nutritional supplements or therapies.

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Dr. Pearson is passionate about Holistic and Cosmetic Dentistry. She has attended continuing education courses in sleep / airway appliances, orthopedic orthodontics, TMJ, and safe amalgam removal.



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