



Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity

Some people report a variety of symptoms that they attribute to exposure to very low-level electromagnetic fields. The World Health Organization (WHO) has concluded that while the symptoms are real there is no scientific basis to link the symptoms to exposure to electromagnetic fields. Furthermore WHO says that treatment of affected individuals should focus on the health symptoms and the clinical picture, and not on the person's perceived need to reduce or eliminate electromagnetic fields in the workplace or home.

Background

Some people report that they experience a range of symptoms, including headaches and sleeping difficulties, when exposed to very low-level electromagnetic fields (EMFs) from a variety of sources, including mobile phones and their antenna sites. These signals are often well below the allowable levels in international guidelines. These conditions are sometimes described as *electrosensitivity* or *electromagnetic hypersensitivity* (EHS). The WHO has suggested that a more appropriate term for sensitivity to environmental factors is *Idiopathic Environmental Intolerance* (IEI).

World Health Organization EHS Workshop

The WHO convened a workshop on this topic in Prague in October 2004 to review what was known about the condition and develop advice for to help people with the reported symptoms. A key outcome was a WHO Fact Sheet that concluded:

'...Whatever its cause, EHS can be a disabling problem for the affected individual. EHS has no clear diagnostic criteria and there is no scientific basis to link EHS symptoms to EMF exposure. Further, EHS is not a medical diagnosis, nor is it clear that it represents a single medical problem.'

The Fact Sheet goes on to provide advice to EHS individuals, physicians, governments and researchers. For physicians it states:

'Treatment of affected individuals should focus on the health symptoms and the clinical picture, and not on the person's perceived need for reducing or eliminating EMF in the workplace or home.'





Importantly the WHO advises that governments produce appropriately targeted and balanced information that includes a clear statement that no scientific basis currently exists for a connection between EHS and exposure to EMF.

Other Scientific Research

Germany researchers recently reviewed relevant scientific studies and concluded that many had technical limitations related to exposure assessment or self-reporting bias. Overall, while calling for further research they stated:

'...an effect of exposure to electromagnetic fields from mobile communication on well-being cannot be derived based on these limited studies.'

More recently a report in the British Medical Journal described a double-blind study involving 60 self-reported EHS persons and 60 control subjects, concluding:

'We found no evidence to indicate that self reported sensitivity to 900 MHz GSM mobile phone signals has a biological basis...These findings agree with the large majority of previous blind or double blind provocation studies for electromagnetic sensitivity, which have found no differences in the severity of symptoms elicited by active or sham exposure to electromagnetic fields.'

GSM Association Position

The WHO has concluded that there is no scientific basis to link symptoms to exposure to electromagnetic fields. We support the WHO recommendation that treatment of affected individuals should have the aim of helping them to develop strategies for coping and to encourage them to lead a normal social life. Importantly, this should be distinguished from the person's perceived need to reduce or eliminate electromagnetic fields in the workplace or home.

Where to go for more information

Rubin et al, Are some people sensitive to mobile phone signals? Within participants double blind randomised provocation study, British Medical Journal, 332(7546):886-891, 15 April 2006.

Seitz et al, Electromagnetic hypersensitivity (EHS) and subjective health complaints associated with electromagnetic fields of mobile phone communication – a literature review published between 2000 and 2004, Science of The Total Environment, 349(1-3):45-55, 15 October 2005.

WHO Fact sheet N°296, Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity, December 2005:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs296/en/>.

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