



ELECTROMAGNETIC HYPERSENSITIVITY: NEW WHO FACT SHEET

In December 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a fact sheet (No 296) on electromagnetic (EM) hypersensitivity.¹

The WHO is the specialised United Nations agency for health and is the world's most authoritative and respected health body. The WHO issued the fact sheet following expert workshops and conferences, a report from the European Commission and recent reviews of the scientific literature.

For some time, a number of individuals have reported a variety of health problems that they have attributed to exposure to electromagnetic field (EMF) emissions, such as those produced by mobile phones, base stations and other wireless devices. These individuals have often been described as being EM 'hypersensitive'.²

According to the WHO, a variety of non-specific symptoms including dermatological symptoms (redness, tingling and burning sensations), fatigue, tiredness, concentration difficulties, dizziness, nausea, heart palpitation and digestive disturbances are attributed to EM hypersensitivity.

The MMF notes the WHO's clear guidance on this issue and its conclusion that:

- EM hypersensitivity has no clear diagnostic criteria and there is no scientific basis to link these symptoms to EMF exposure
- EM hypersensitivity is characterised by a variety of non-specific symptoms that differ between individuals
- The symptoms being experienced are real and can be disabling
- EM hypersensitivity is not a medical diagnosis and it is not clear that it represents a single medical problem.

The WHO goes on to state that treatment of sufferers who relate their symptoms to EM hypersensitivity should focus on the health symptoms and clinical picture by performing:

- A medical evaluation to identify and treat any specific conditions that may be responsible for the symptoms
- A psychological evaluation to identify alternative psychiatric or physiological conditions that may be responsible for the symptoms
- An assessment of the workplace and home for factors that might contribute to the presented symptoms.

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¹ Available from the WHO website, see: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs296/en/>.

² The WHO prefers the expression "Idiopathic Environmental Intolerance" (IEI) to EM hypersensitivity (see WHO Fact Sheet No 296); IEI does not imply causation of the symptoms being experienced.