

'I'm allergic to modern living'

By LIZ HULL - [More by this author](#) > 22nd March 2007 [Comments \(24\)](#)

For most people talking on a mobile phone, cooking dinner in the microwave or driving in a car is simply part of modern living in 21st century Britain.

But completing any such tasks is impossible for Debbie Bird - because she is allergic to modern technology.

The 39-year-old is so sensitive to the electromagnetic field (emf) or 'smog' created by computers, mobile phones, microwave ovens and even some cars, that she develops a painful skin rash and her eyelids swell to three times their size if she goes near them.

As a consequence, Mrs Bird, a health spa manager, has transformed her home into an EMF-free zone to try and stay healthy.

The walls are all covered in special carbon paint, the windows have a protective film on them and she and her husband, Tony, 45, even sleep under a silver-plated mosquito net to deflect the radiowaves.



Debbie and her husband Tony often sleep in a silver-plated mosquito net

'I can no longer do things that I used to take for granted,' Mrs Bird said last night. 'My day-to-day life has been seriously affected by EMF.'

'I don't own a microwave. I don't use mobile phones at all. I can't even use a cordless phone. We have a plasma screen TV because the old style one gave out gamma rays, which brought on my reaction.'

'I can't even get in my friend's BMW. If I do I immediately start getting a headache and my head starts tingling.'

'Even shopping is a problem. I can't go in places like Starbucks where there is Wi-Fi broadband and always have to be aware of my environment.'

Mrs Bird first realised that she was electro-sensitive when she moved with her husband, a writer and environmental consultant, and their eight-year-old daughter, Antonia, to a new apartment in Bowden, near Altrincham, Greater Manchester.

Unbeknown to her, however, her neighbours were all using wireless internet connections and had cordless phones.

'At first I couldn't sleep,' Mrs Bird added. 'Then I started developing a skin reaction. I had a burning sensation down my face, on my forehead and elbows. I looked like I had been severely burnt on my forehead.'



Debbie Bird's eyelids swell to three times their size when she is exposed to microwaves

'I felt very tired all the time and my eye-lids would swell up to three times their size.'

Mrs Bird was referred to a skin specialist, but the problem was so severe the couple decided they had no option but to move to a new home, in nearby Hale, Greater Manchester.

They took electromagnetic readings of the property and set about making it safe. The house was completely re-wired, had clear protective film put on the windows and every wall was painted with black carbon paint, which cost £250 per tin, to deflect the harmful rays.

All the couple's bedroom curtains are also silver-plated and they sleep under a silver-plated mosquito net, which also protects against radiation.



Debbie's home is a radio-wave free zone. A clear protective film has been put on the windows and the walls have been redecorated with a special carbon paint

Although the renovation was not cheap, Mrs Bird said it was worth it. Her skin rashes have gone and she no longer has trouble sleeping. Officially in the UK, electro-sensitivity (ES) does not exist as a medical condition.

Doctors say there is little scientific evidence to back up a link between EMF and poor health. They claim the symptoms, often attributed to flu or viruses, are psychosomatic.

But campaigners disagree. They reckon around 500 people are already being treated for ES and as many as five per cent of the population could be affected.

Rod Read, director of Electro-Sensitivity UK, said: 'I have seen hundreds of people who exhibit symptoms they directly attribute to the electrical items around them.'

'But it is a politically incorrect illness, the Government or electronic companies don't want people thinking their mobile phones or microwaves are dangerous.'

'In the past doctors have dismissed symptoms as something like flu, but the pathology is now established. It has a huge detrimental physical effect and stops people living normal lives.'

Comments (24)

24 people have commented on this story so far. Tell us what you think below.

I think an awful lot more people are going to be becoming afflicted with illnesses like this. Scientists have no idea of the effect of all these artificial amounts of these elements on our bodies.

- Ruth, Earls Barton, Northants

Sounds like a nut-bar to me.

- Barry Mckay, Ottawa, Canada

This lady is clearly having a problem with something, but to call it an allergy is incorrect. Allergy has a specific meaning in medicine, and allergic reactions are triggered by immune system response to antigen (particles). Electromagnetic waves cannot act as antigens as they are not particles at all.

- Chris, Mirleft, Yorkshire

I feel really sorry for this woman. It really must make your everyday life such a challenge having to watch every single place you go and thing in it. My prayers are with her.

- Amy, Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, USA

Debbie should try wearing an aluminum foil hat. I wear one, and it keeps the aliens and our government from doing mind control. I also string paper clips together and hang them from my belt to keep me grounded. It appears to me that Dennie is suffering from an food allergy.

- Michael, East McKeesport, Pennsylvania USA

How did she get to 39 without the problems? Microwave and mobiles etc have been around for ages.

- Joelle, Masevaux France

its not EMF - it's her head that needs examining - there is no definitive data to support her claim - she would've had problems with going outside a long, long time ago if that was the case.

- M Mason, US

You cannot get away from electromagnetic radiation. It is everywhere. It simply spills in from everywhere including deep space. There is something else going on with her. I hope they figure it out before they waste any more money on silly home EM shielding. Someone may have them bamboozled!

- S. Sparkenickle, West Bumpgarten

I do not think that we realize what we are exposed to, nor the effects of our exposure.

I am impressed with their dedication to their health. We should all take such an active approach. Perhaps then the health care system would not succeed in dosing us all upon their own recommendation.

It seems every time I am at a doctor's office a drug sales rep is coming or going with freebies. I doubt it is because they are so altruistic nor generous.

- Jeremy, Southeast Alaska

Why couldn't she be hypersensitive? It may simply be getting worse, which is why is hasn't bothered her so much until now.

I microwaved my hand (by accident) in a cheap oven and what she is describing (tingling) is exactly the feeling I got.

Maybe they could arrange to test her, like a hearing test, and see if she (and all the others) are on the level or not?

- Larry, Jefferson, USA

Not totally far fetched. People with the auto-immune disease Lupus often have severe flares and wind up in the hospital just from exposure to sunlight or flourescent lightbulbs which break down their DNA. Don't take my word for it - ask any physician on the planet. There are a fairly large number of people with Lupus.

- Mary Baptiste, New York, NY

I thought it was important to address one of the statements this woman made:

"We have a plasma screen TV because the old style one gave out gamma rays, which brought on my reaction."

CRT televisions do not emit gamma rays. Look it up online.

It's true that TVs in the 1960s were found to emit higher than acceptable levels of x-rays but that's a problem that doesn't exist today.

- Joe, Saint Louis, MO

She should look into NAET or accupuncture. Allergy elimination may be able to eliminate this problem, or at least seriously reduce it.

- Jonathan, New York, USA

I also have a very slight sensitivity to EM. I feel just slightly sick to my stomach when I talk on a cell or cordless phone for more than a few minutes. It does not seem a real stretch to believe that it could be worse in others.

- John, USA

She is doing exactly what her husband wants - drumming up clients for his consulting business. The human body is not sensitive enough to electromagnetic radiation at the levels and frequencies put out by Wi-Fi, cell phones, and microwaves to cause her symptoms. She either has allergies to something detectable or this is a huge scam.

- Dunston, New York, NY USA

Michael, it is interesting that you also know about wearing the aluminum foil hat. I have been wearing mine for years and guess what - no embarrassing rashes here!

- Aaron, Baton Rouge, LA

Barry, that's wingnut.

- Aaron, Baton Rouge, LA

Joelle,

Allergies often develop later in life. Ask any cat lover who was forced to give away a beloved pet after owning cats for decades. I personally was prescribed penicillin many times - until I was 38 years old, when I developed an allergy to the medicine I'd taken tens of times.

- Bruce, Kansas, USA

Clearly no-one has done a double-blind test (where "victim" spends some time in a controlled environment, and where victim and examining doctor don't know whether or not she was subject to EMF) demonstrating such sensitivity, or we'd have heard about it in this or a similar article. Such a test would not be hard or very expensive to attempt, yet I doubt we will ever see such sensitivity confirmed.

- Dwpittelli, Adams, MA USA

Joelle, it's just like any condition; you develop it over time. Michael, I hope and pray no one you know develops this condition.

- Karim, Atlanta, GA, USA

Carbon paint, and window films? Whatever keeps her happy I guess. I may have to open a store that specializes in such products to help the suffering of these poor individuals. I can use the profit to buy a really nice bed to help me sleep at night.

She appears to be allergic to all emf from the 50 hertz line current to the giga hertz microwave. Visible light is also the same beast albeit at a much shorter wavelength.

- Jeff, WI USA

I thought my peanut allergy was bad.

- Brian, Virginia

I agree with Joelle, it is very unusual to develop such severe allergies as an adult. I suspect something else going on, possibly an autoimmune condition that wanes and flares. I'd like to know what the skin specialist thought.

- Carol, London UK

This doesn't need to be a big mystery. She has such a strong reaction that it should be easy to do some double-blind experiments where she is exposed to low levels of microwave radiation at different frequencies. If there is something to this, it should be characterized for further study.

- John, New Orleans, USA