

CURSED

by chemicals

Derval Dunford, 42, turned to meditation to combat the toxic hell around her caused by paint, shampoo and perfume

For most people, their home is a sanctuary, a place to retreat to at the end of a busy day.

But for those with multiple chemical sensitivity, 'home sweet home' can become a toxic hell.

Derval Dunford had no idea she was suffering from the extremely rare disorder until one day while painting doors in her kitchen, she was suddenly struck by a severe migraine, nausea and

extreme exhaustion. In 2004 Derval was diagnosed with chronic fatigue brought on by a rare condition called Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS).

"It's hard to pinpoint exactly when I first began to suffer from the MCS," she says.

"It was the time when I was painting that caused me to seek help, and we discovered it was because I was allergic to the chemicals in the paint I was using, but in hindsight it had happened many times before, just not to the same extreme.

"My allergies had been building up over time."

MCS is recognised as an extremely rare condition and relatively little is known about it in this country.

However a friend of Derval's knew a man in Sligo who also suffered from it and guessed she had the same condition.

"My friend gave me his number and I talked to him. What really frightened me was that his symptoms were so much worse than mine.

"He would collapse when he came into contact with chemicals.

"But then I did some research into MCS and it started to make sense.

"I had never heard of it but I began to connect me feeling sick with certain things I was doing.

"The colour would

drain from my face and I was white as a ghost and then I would become exhausted."

Derval went to see a nurse who specialised in allergy treatments to help her find out what was causing her problems.

"The specialist carried out some tests and told me my energy levels were the lowest she'd ever come across.

"She gave me a long list of foods and chemicals I had to avoid."

From that moment on the Westport woman's whole life turned upside down.

A successful beautician, Derval was no longer able to work as she had become allergic to the beauty products she was using, especially nail varnish.

"It changed my life completely. I had to stay away from

all chemicals which is a lot more difficult that it might sound.

"I couldn't be near cleaning products, soap, or shampoo. Even people wearing perfume or deodorant would make me feel terrible.

"For three months I couldn't work or socialise. I became a prisoner in my own home as I couldn't come into contact with everyday household products.

Any type of inhalation, no matter how small, would set the MCS off, even if it was just a case of being near someone with freshly washed hair."

But while Derval was at home she decided to invest her

time in something positive to help her condition and for her that proved to be meditation.

Findings from respected American surgeon Bernie Segal report that meditation can help to strengthen the immune system, and Derval believes that detoxing her mind played a big part in her recovery.

"I soon found the time I spent at home to be a mixed blessing.

"Prior to being diagnosed with MCS I was a very busy person.

"I was always anxious about something and never found anytime to relax. I found it hard to just sit, but then MCS really stopped me in my tracks. I couldn't go anywhere.

"I felt very isolated at this time especially as no-one, including myself, really under-

stood the illness.

"However, if I hadn't become ill I would never have experienced the

life changing benefits of practicing meditation."

Derval still tries to lead as chemical-free a life as she possibly can, however she is now able to come into contact with everyday items without suffering from exhaustion.

"Because it was such a difficult time for me I needed something to give my life balance, and that for me was meditation," she says.

"Once I realised how much it had helped me, I thought it would also help others.

'I couldn't even be near someone with freshly-washed hair'

By: Naosie Wolsey

Real life



Mind power

Meditation has given my difficult life a balance

"I decided to put together a programme for people as a seven-week course. I've been running my own classes for two and a half years now and they're very successful.

"However people were telling me that they found it difficult to do the meditation at home, so I thought it would be great to make a meditation CD and provide something that gives people a range of options and caters for everybody."

This inspired Derval to cre-

ate Suí, Ireland's first guided meditation CD.

"In today's chaotic world, meditation and relaxation need to be seen as a necessity not a luxury.

"Suí is exactly what I would have wished for when I was anxious and stressed out about my illness.

"Suí is perfect for a wide range of people, not necessarily just those who are ill, but anyone dealing with the pressures of day to day life.

"Even the busiest person can find five minutes to relax and listen to the tracks."

Suí for you

Derval has created Suí, Ireland's first guided meditation CD. The CD is available to buy now at selected bookshops and online at www.sui.ie priced at just €24.95.

