



*Stephen's Healthy Housing Column*

## **Time to Look at Your Home in a Different Light: The Bedroom**

*Stephen Collette, BBEC, LEED AP*

Stephen Collette is a Certified Building Biology Environmental Consultant (BBEC). This lengthy certification analyses the built environment and how it impacts people's health. Stephen was a natural builder for 5 years specializing in straw bale construction. Stephen has an engineering background and training which enables him to understand the various processes occurring within the home and how they can interact. Applying these skills and knowledge to the standard home and small office enables Your Healthy House to find the reasons for poor indoor air quality and to create solutions to help create your healthy house.

Stephen Collette is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design - Accredited Professional (LEED AP), which allows Stephen to use the Canada Green Building Council's guidelines and method to ensure a quantitative approach to building

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For many people who have had MCS for some time, they have slowly made their living space their sanctuary. For those who are newly diagnosed, things are going to be different, and need to be for you to stay as well as possible. That means looking at your home in a different light. This series of articles will walk through the kinds of elements that I look for in a healthy house and where the potential problems lie within a home. We will focus on the sneaky things that you may have missed in your own process as well.

### **The Bedroom**

For many with MCS, the bedroom can be the single safest room there is in the house. For some, this is where much of the time inside is spent as well. And if the bedroom is not as healthy as possible, then sleeping, healing, and recovering while sleeping becomes harder to do. Making the bedroom a truly safe place is critical and a priority for many with environmental sensitivities.

First thing first, work on the bed. This is what's called the “low hanging fruit” or the easy stuff we can do to improve the conditions in the bed, and therefore the bedroom.

Air out your bed just like your

grandma used to do. We apparently sweat up to a pint a night; I'm sure furrier men sweat more than women. Then we add our skin cells, hair follicles, and other stuff to that mix. If you just make your bed right away in the morning, all you are doing is tucking those little beasts in for the day to party while you are away.

This creates a warm, damp, food rich environment for dust mites. Now we are not allergic to them directly, but to their feces as they are one of the few creatures on the planet stupider than humans... and there are not many. They eat molds and it's that part of their diet which makes their feces a tad reactive to us. Airing out the bed pulls the easiest leg of the three-legged stool of life out from under them. If you haven't heard of the three-legged stool of life, it is food, water and a warm place to live. If you remove one of those legs, survival is not possible.

Airing out the bed allows the moisture to evaporate, which can be improved if you can open your windows in the morning for fresh air and ultraviolet (that's the sunshine) to come in. Dust mites hate ultraviolet, so that sun helps kill them off. By reducing the dust mite population in the morning, you reduce the amount of allergens in your bed and therefore improve the health of your bed.

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For added value, once a year drag your mattress outside in the sun and let the ultraviolet kill off everything on your bed. Put it on the front porch so it gives the neighbors something to talk about.

Now for your pillows: The University of Manchester did a study where by weight after 10 years, the typical foam pillow was half original material and half dust mites and dust mite feces! That is not good. So consider switching from foam pillows (made with petroleum products and glued together with formaldehyde binders which fall under the not very healthy category) to a healthier pillow.

Healthier pillows vary with people. Feather and down are allergenic to many. Kapok and buckwheat are pretty healthy, but for me they sound like a thunderstorm in my head, so I don't personally like them. I prefer natural latex foam pillows, which are made from rubber trees, not petroleum. They are a little stiffer than regular foam and dust mites hate the stuff. I paid about \$40 for mine, so you should find some in that price

range. Sheets: Most people with environmental sensitivities use sheets that they know and trust. That's excellent. Older sheets are healthy as they have had time to have the pesticides from the cotton wash out of them, and any sizing as well, which is usually de because it is cheaper than starch.

If you need new sheets, look for ones that are organic. Their prices are definitely dropping into the feasible range in many places. Other choices would be bamboo, a nice rayon feel, since rayon is a plant based fiber just like bamboo. Bamboo typically does not have pesticides used on it, since it grows like a weed. For wintertime, apparently flannel sheets have fewer chemicals on them than regular cotton sheets based on the process to make them, so you can consider that warm, snuggly choice as well.

With any bedding, the larger concern is the laundry soap used as it is a full exposure while sleeping, and in fact a 24 hour exposure. You need to have scent free, chemical free, natural based laundry soaps and that is a major priority for people with environmental illness. Also that means no dryer sheets, as they leave a petroleum film on your fabrics. This is critical and if you haven't switched to healthier laundry soap, you need to do that first and foremost.



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### **When a Bedroom is not a Bedroom**

Trying to make the bedroom the safest place in the house can be daunting and may require more work than outlined in this article. The safest place you have in your house or apartment may be another room, such as the living room, for example. If that is the case, move your bed there. Really, move it there and sleep safely. That’s the priority, and nothing else. I have seen it done more than once and for those people, dismissing the “social concerns” meant they could function better during the day and that their health

took on the importance it deserved.

### **Conclusion**

In the second part of this article we will go beyond the bed and look at the rest of your bedroom and how to make it as healthy as possible.

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