Chemical Sensitivity: Is it all in your head??

Andy: Chemical sensitivity. It's all in your head. I'm sure you've been told that a few times in your life today. Jay and I are going to talk about this myth, but is it really a myth? There might be some reality to this where you have a fear of a reaction, therefore you actually have a reaction. So today on Non Toxic Environments, Jay and I are going to talk about this controversial topic and we'll get to some customer questions. Jay, welcome back to the show this week. You know, it's going to be a little bit different. Both of us are feeling like we're coming down with a cold.

Jay: Yeah, thanks for the advice on taking care of that Andy. Appreciate it.

Andy: Well, load up on vitamin C to the point that it's... You've had too much. Okay. I won't describe how you know this. The other thing is I love the Fire Cider products and not only just the brand Fire Cider, but the homemade products as well. It's apple cider vinegar with honey, a whole host of ingredients that are really good for heating up the body and getting it to start to take care of itself.

Jay: Well, what's the body chemistry in terms of pH and acidity? What's the... because that just popped into my head. Is the idea that we want to take our body to be a little more alkaline? I mean, that's kind of generally the idea anyway. So we want to run our body. Our body chemistry wants to be alkaline, not acidic. And most of us run acidic body chemistry.

Andy: Well, and there's a lot of information out there about using alkaline water.

Jay: Right? Which I do.

Andy: We work with a brand of water filtration systems that turns water into alkaline water. And you know, there's a lot of these technologies out there, folks that I think that they need to be studied more. I can't say for sure they're great and they're all going to work. I think anything's worth a try. Neither Jay nor I claim to be physicians. We we're not trying to give medical advice whatsoever but I think it's worth trying some of these things and when it comes

to just the common cold utilizing in the apple cider vinegar with a habanero and turmeric and honey, usually does the trick with me.

Jay: Yeah. And it gives you a nice little... it's got a good bite to it too. Well, I think what you're alluding to Andy, I think is true and I think people are aware of this now. You know, there's more than just the Western model of medicine that we can take a look at and explore. And I think it's really worth to everyone listening that you do, that you explore the modalities that are out there and available to you. So a lot of, there's a lot of good information, there's a lot of good things that are happening outside of the Western allopathic medical model. And so I'm encouraged to explore that on your own and decide what works best for you. So we're going to talk about today, one of the things that we've talked about, as long as the podcast has been running in that is chemical sensitivity.

Andy: Right. And I guess, you know, the preceding message about you and I both kind of feel like we're coming down to go with a cold here is to talk a little bit to medicine and medical issues. And again, folks, we are not physicians, but Jay and I both have been around this world for many, many years, in the world of chemical sensitivity. And you know, each of us have thousands and thousands of clients we've worked with and all of those clients have been able to educate us about this. And the topic that we wanted to discuss today is something that we may have alluded to in previous episodes, but it's been encouraged to us by a number of listeners lately that we should actually bring it up on the show. And I don't want to turn this into a discussion of, you know, again, medical ideas and practices and so forth. What I wanted to talk about is the fact that in chemical sensitivity or with the chemical sensitivity, it is well known but never really talked about that there is actually having a physical reaction to a chemical, a product that was brought into a room. You know, where this is going, but there's also having a physical reaction due to the mind telling you to have a physical reaction. And so...

Jay: And that is just the body's natural tendency to fight or flight. Isn't that a part of that mechanism where the body is getting some signals and then the body's injecting or releasing chemicals into the body to react to that in one way or the other?

Andy: Correct.

Jay: And adrenaline as such.

Andy: Let me break it down a little bit more for everybody. Um, you walk into a building and you smell a chemical or a chemical like odor or a fragrance that you don't recognize. For those who have been suffering with chemical sensitivity for any period of time, instantly start to fear the unknown because you're used to those odors equating a physical reaction with the body, right? So because of that, your mind says, Oh, here we go. And it causes an adrenaline response that fight or flight mode and your body can actually have a physical reaction to the fear of the unknown. So I bring this topic up very gingerly because I'm not trying to say that chemical sensitivity is psychosomatic or it's all in your head because folks, you've all heard that for how many years now from your own physicians when you first started to figure out what was going on. And so the last thing I want to do is agree with those those comments, because that's not what I'm saying at all. What I'm saying, however, is as what has been, described to me by the late Dr. Rea, by my own physician here locally Dr. Toth, and other physicians I've talked to across the country that the body can actually have a reaction to the fear of the unknown and it will mimic a typical reaction to a chemical or a fragrance. Does that make sense, Jay?

Jay: Yeah, Andy, that makes a whole lot of sense. And I think just to backup a little bit for folks I thought it'd be probably worthwhile to give you what a consensus of physicians have described as the definition for chemical sensitivity. This is by the way, the library of medicine, the US library of medicine and this is their 1999 consensus. I'll just read it. The criteria for chemical sensitivity, 1) a chronic condition 2) with symptoms that recur reproducibly 3) response to low levels of exposure 4} to multiple unrelated chemicals and 5) improve or resolve when incitements are removed. There's another six criteria that now propose of adding and that is that the symptoms occur in multiple organ systems. So that that's just kind of a clinical description of what multiple chemical sensitivity is.

Andy: And so, you know, think about this. Again, like I said, you walk into a space and you sense something that you don't recognize, and then you'd actually have a reaction to the fear of the unknown. I would like to relate this to- let's look at even something like Safecoat paint. One of the things that has been talked about over the years that Safecoat paint actually has a

more of a paint smell than some of the other zero VOC paints made by the big companies. Well, why is that? Well, it's because they use chemical masking agents.

Jay: I went to a conference one time; there was a workshop and it was for contractors and one of the contractors approached our booth and he came up and he said, you know, I don't really need this stuff. And I said, really? Tell me about that. He says, well, you know, I can actually buy a masking agent and I can and have just put it in the paint I'm using and the client never knows the difference.

Andy: There you go.

Jay: And I was like, Oh boy. Yup. Mind my own...

Andy: It's kind of an interesting story. Years ago here in Wisconsin, there was a big box store. It wasn't one we know about it is more local to the upper Midwest and they had a private label paint brand called Ed Dwiggins paint. Well, Ed Dwiggins paints came out with a paint that had a fresh lemon smell. And I remember the commercial, this is just about the time when I started selling Safecoat. So early 90s, and Ed Dwiggins paint, they had this advertising that said, well, if you don't like the smell of paint then you should love our fresh lemon scent that we put into every gallon. So your room smells fresh and so on and so forth. Well, they took it off the market after about probably about a year. They found out that, first of all, you know, the smell of lemon over the smell of a toxic paint odor just makes for the smell of a toxic lemon paint odor. And they found that that lemon scent that they used actually turn rancid after a period of time.

Jay: Boy, Oh boy.

Andy: So, that was my first exposure, no pun intended, to the use of masking agents, and then as I started to work with Safecoat and other brands of products that we deal with now, I realized that manufacturers mastered the art of taking anywhere from 5 to 15 different chemicals and adding them into products. And it's kinda like that old adage of yellow plus blue make green? Well one smell plus another smell can actually equal no smell.

There you go.

Andy: And that's what a chemical masking agent is.

Jay: It's reminding me also, and this is kind of on the side, when people are using cleaning products and the cleaning products have some kind of fragrance to them. I think it's, there's an interesting psychology because with a cleaner, like ours for example, ours is Safechoice All Purpose Cleaner. There's no smell to it. And there's an interesting thing that happens with people. They use it, but they don't smell a clean smell, like a fragrance smell. And they associate that with it being ineffective and that the cleaner can't possibly be working because I don't smell that cleaner smell.

Andy: Right. I remember years ago, Jay, I forget which hospital it was that we were working on, and they were using Super Clean, the Safecoat product, and absolutely loved it. But after a period of, I don't know, maybe a 30 day test period, they said, we love the product, but we're not gonna use it. And obviously we questioned why and they said, well, the problem is because it doesn't have that citrus aroma or the pine smell. We can actually smell when our cleaning crews don't do a good enough job and don't.. So, those chemicals masking agents that are used not only hide the smell of the cleaner chemicals themselves, but also help in, as you say, giving people that illusion that it's a freshly clean space. It's like the smell of new cars. You know, every manufacturer of cars has their own signature aroma. And you know, when you're getting into a new Ford or a new Chevy or a new Hyundai that it's that brand because it smells like that brand. And so we're kind of going off on a tangent onto chemical masking agents. But you know, boiling all this down folks, what this means is that sometimes the mind is a powerful thing. Sometimes the mind is telling the body that there is something wrong, even if there really isn't something wrong, but the mind is so used to certain triggers that it's going to cause that same reaction. And so, think back to all the different episodes we've done, Jay, and we've told people, well before you do the whole job, you should test for personal tolerance, right?

Jay: Right, right.

Andy: Doing a staining job, whatever it is. One of the reasons why you want to test for personal tolerance too is so that you recognize the aromas that are created when you use these products in your home. I had a client many years ago who was building a home and we had her

and her husband test every single product that was going into their house. I'm talking all the way down to the screws and the nails holding it together.

Jay: Holy moly.

Andy: And she did the sniff test. And then if she had some reaction, she would take that further to kind of determine what it was. I mean, she really was quite diligent with this. Now side note, people have asked me over the years if I could reproduce that Excel spreadsheet for them so that they had a checklist and I don't do that because everybody is different. And I don't want to be in a situation where just because it's good for one doesn't mean it's good for all. But anyway, one of the reasons, or one of the best reasons for doing this was I knew that if she ever walked onto the job site at any given time at part of the process, every odor that would be on site would be something she's already assessed and recognized and approved. Therefore, there's no fear. There's no fear of the reaction. There's no adrenaline response. There's no stress. You know, we've talked about stress being a huge impact on how our body reacts.

Jay: Completely huge. Yeah. And so she went through the process and the right way because then she could be exposed to something that someone else may go, whoa, what is that? And she's like, nope, I know what that is. And I'm comfortable with it. I'm not going to have a reaction to it. It's fine.

Andy: Exactly. Exactly.

Jay: That would be a that would be a good spreadsheet, even though it's just for her. I'm fascinated with the whole idea of what a screw smells like.

Andy: Well, I don't know if she actually, I don't think she actually described the smell. Like she was trying to, you know, be a wine sommelier. Robust yet not overpowering. But I believe it was basically approve, not approve or maybe, and then if it went to a maybe then we'd have to go to some additional testing. In certain situations folks, that's the only way we can do it. Chemical sensitivity is so different from person to person, yet we all understand if you have one

or work within this this world, we all understand what it means. But everybody would describe it about themselves a little bit differently.

Jay: So I think the other side of the, the discussion is all those folks who, and I speak specifically about new families are having children and their whole concept is to try to create a really healthy environment for their new children. And so they're aware of because there's a lot of information now out about this. They're aware of the challenges and exposures that can happen and they want to protect their children from that so that they can be calm, you know, sensitized and have all those, those, those problems that go along with it. Probably what folks are probably thinking, okay, I feel like I'm chemically sensitive now. do I do? I mean, who do I turn to? Who do I talk to? I mean, I may even have, I have doubt within my own family of my sanity. So, where do I go? We can speak to that a little bit. The field of environmental medicine has grown by leaps and bounds over the years. Andy talked about Dr. William Rae. God bless his soul, he just passed away last year but he actually set up his clinic in Dallas back in 1977 if you can believe that all the way back then. And the whole focus of the practice there is to understand personal chemical sensitivity. You go there for treatment, they figure it through protocols, they figure out what it is you should be staying away from and then, and then you'd come back home with a program to get yourself back in balance. So I'm saying this because, and I haven't been to their website lately, but my sense is there's probably some resources on the American environmental health clinic website, American environmental health clinic website. This will be in the show notes anyway. But, there's probably a resource here for physicians who may be practicing environmental medicine close to you. May be a resource for people if they're looking to get counseled by someone other than their regular doctor.

Andy: Right. And, you know, I've, I've spent a lot of time discussing these things, not only with Dr. Rae over the years, with other physicians that I know, Dr who's been on the show, we hope to have her back on next couple of weeks. I'm not looking to turn this into a whole discussion, but chemical sensitivity is a very, very taxing, draining, disease. Not only for the person who has it, but for the physician who's trying to treat it. Because it's very difficult to treat something that you can't see. And, you know, we see this, right? You go to your doctor, say, I've got a pain in my knee. Well, let's do a x-ray. Let's do an MRI. Let's do a CAT scan what are we going to do. And then you still don't find anything wrong, but I still got that pain. Well, chemical sensitivity is very similar to that. You can't see it on an x-ray. There's no really... perfect...

Jay: Diagnostic for it. Yeah, there's no, there's no perfect diagnostic for it.

Andy: Right. And I think that a lot of times physicians get really burned out trying to work with folks who have sensitivities because they've exhausted all of their ideas and it's still doesn't help am so I hear from these clients who these they've dealt with seven physicians, you know, three psychologists now they're onto holistic health care practitioners. And nobody can figure it out. Well, I think what happens is, again, the more you're involved in this and the more you're trying to figure it out, and the longer you're dealing with this, the more cynical a person gets. Like, you know what, nobody's helping me. Nobody can understand what I'm going through. Nobody can fix this. And everything I come in contact with is killing me. I don't believe, and I say this with the most respect for everybody who listens to us and who is clients of ours. I don't believe that is always the case. I don't believe that everything you come in contact with that has an aroma is actually dangerous. However, I completely understand why you would think that and I completely understand why your body says it is because of that fight or flight response. I don't want to come across as being that guy, you know? Oh, you don't believe us folks. If I didn't believe you, I wouldn't have been in this industry for close to 30 years.

Jay: Yeah. Amen to that. I feel exactly the same way. So, yeah. So I think it's just basically telling people, you know, just pay attention but don't overreact. As you know, as your example of your client who did the, you know, the really thorough test, I think that's probably the best way for you to get some kind of a handle on this folks, is to do as the duties kind of sampling experiments. Andy says it all the time. You know, it's a mantra we have here as well knowing because everyone's different. So within the same family, well, everyone's different. So you have to be able to test your, own, your own situation in a unique way, and then make your determinations based upon that kind of real world exposure and experience.

Andy: And understand that just because something has a smell or doesn't have a smell is no indication about the toxicity or any health aspects to it. You know, I'll give you two examples. Carbon monoxide has no smell, but it'll kill you. Cooking salmon in the oven smells horrible. It's not going to kill you. All right. And I use those examples with customers every single day and I get them to chuckle a little bit. And that's a part of the process too is understanding that we, you know, we can deal with us. But you have to allow yourself to believe this. You have to allow

yourself to believe that not every fragrance out there is designed specifically to harm you. And some do. I totally understand that, but some don't. Not all of them do. Okay. On the flip side, just because something is natural doesn't mean it's safe either; don't doubt yourself with essential oils because you know it's going to help you sleep at night. Well, no, it's actually gonna cause more harm than good. All right.

Jay: Yeah I think there's some misconceptions that if it's all natural it's potentially all safe too.

Andy: And that's exactly right.

Jay: And that's not done. That's not necessarily the case.

Andy: However, I think we kind of beat this one up. I think we did. I think we did. I think we've discussed it enough and folks, again, Jay and I, we are two dedicated people in this world. The last thing we are trying to do is tell you that's all in your head. We know it's not, we know it's not folks, but we also know is that sometimes you need a third party to say, here's what it could be. And I think if you actually sat down and thought about it would make a lot of sense too.

Jay: Yeah, I think that's, I think that's wise advice. Andy.

Andy: So Jay, we got a little extra time today. I'm wanting to maybe throw in some customer questions.

Jay: Yeah, yeah. You've got some there. I don't have any in front of me, but I can probably dive in.

Andy: Well, I got one here, just came across my desk.

Jay: Yeah. Okay, good. That's fresh.

Andy: This is from Alexandria and she says, "hey guys, we're having a major issue with black mold growth on our bathroom ceiling and shower curtain. We're about to purchase a dehumidifier as a temporary option to reduce moisture as that bathroom has no vent out.

Which primer or product can you recommend once thoroughly cleaned once we have thoroughly cleaned the mold away. Thanks so much for your help."

Jay: Black mold on the ceiling of their bathroom?

Andy: Right.

Jay: Well, you know when I hear these things I go... black mold doesn't just show up overnight.

Andy: Well, here's the other thing too. Black mold is not all toxic black mold. You know, mold is typically dark.

Jay: Yes. Right. Um, it can come with some other colors, but typically dark.

Andy: Yeah. How many species of mold are found in the home, you know, and not all of them is that that toxic Stachybotrys mold. All right. So I understand that black mold growth on the bathroom ceiling happens because you take a shower, the steam carries with it soap scum and dead skin cells that steam condenses. Rises to the ceiling, sticks to the surface, and then the next time it happens and the next time it happens, all of a sudden you've food sources from old. The first thing I'm going to say is, I know it says you don't have vent. I'm going to say, put one in.

Jay: Right.

Andy: I don't care what you do at this point to clean the surface, to prime it, to paint it. I don't care what you do in that bathroom. You will always have problems if you cannot ventilate out the humidity.

Jay: That's a rule. That's the... It's the 11th commandment.

Andy: Right, always ventilate. And so I would love to tell you which primer or product to recommend once you've thoroughly cleaned the mold away. You know? But honestly, it's just

throwing money away. It's going to happen again. It's going to happen again and again and again until you actually get away to ventilate out the moisture.

Jay: So what it was, so let's say they go, forget it. There's no way to do that ventilation. So what's another way to kind of mitigate this? I mean, how about some hydrogen peroxide? I spray hydrogen peroxide in my walk in shower weekly. I don't have a problem and I got a ton of grout too, ton.

Andy: Yeah, but that's a different situation. A walk in shower spraying hydrogen peroxide in the shower where you have tile and grout is different than having mold growth on a painted bathroom ceiling.

Jay: Right, right. But I'm just saying... if you think you can't ventilate, Andy, what am I going to do? What am I going to do? What am I going to do?

Andy: Here's what you're going to do. All right? You're going to get a fan and you're going to blow a fan into the bathroom from the hallway, which is going to cause currents. It's going to eventually ventilate our push out the moisture. All right?

Jay: Okay. All right.

Andy: It's not convenient.

Jay: No.

Andy: It's not attractive.

Jay: No.

Andy: But it works. You could use a dehumidifier too, but that takes too long. You need fans, you need air movement, and then you do have to address the surfaces once you've cleaned them off. And for that, I'd recommend on the ceiling, putting a couple of coats of the Caliwel Home & Office product because as things happen, again, if you, if you're not running the fan

often, you're not, you don't find a way to ventilate. You're going to get mold build up again. And at least using the Caliwel Home & Office paint that's going to eliminate mold spores because it kills them on contact.

Jay: Well, that's a good way to go.

Andy: Okay.

Jay: That's a good way to go.

Andy: But you know, yes. Ventilate.

Jay: Ventilate the 10th, the 11th commandment. Well, I think we've kind of wrapped it up for today, haven't we?

Andy: I think so. I think so. Folks, as always, if you have any questions, have any comments, please reach out to us. You can email me andy@degreeofgreen.com, go to iTunes or wherever you listen to this show. And if you can leave us a rating and a review, we greatly appreciate it. You know, we had a contest a few weeks ago, Jay, where we said anybody who leaves us a review from that show we had with Brandon LaGreca about EMFs.

Jay: Yes.

Andy: That we gave away a copy of his book.

Jay: Great show.

Andy: And I mailed out a bunch of them, to people for writing reviews. You know what folks, keep them coming, you know, if you've want to leave us a review, especially if it's a good one. I'll send you a copy of Brandon's book because I've got a few extras laying around here and it's a wonderful, wonderful read. So, the next few people who leave us a review, I will contact you personally and we'll get your address and get a book on the way.

It doesn't get better than that.

Andy: No, not at all. And folks, as always, it's been an absolute pleasure to be in front of the microphone in front of you all. And Jay, it's always a pleasure to do this with you.

Jay: Yeah, I agree. Andy. I hope folks that we're sharing information, that is going to benefit your life going forward.

Andy: You got it. All right. Now remember what I said, a shot of Fire Cider or three times a day. Lot of vitamin C. And by next week, you and I both will be feeling great.

Jay: I'm excited already. I'm feeling great right now just talking to you.

Andy: Okay. It's this show. It's boosted my immune system.

Jay: Okay. All right, everyone. Take care out there folks. Bye.

Andy: Bye.