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Cellphone towers: One woman's struggle with electromagnetic hypersensitivity

One Toronto woman shares her account of living with an extreme sensitivity to everyday technology

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Veronica Ciandre says she started feeling symptoms after a dozen antennas were installed on her apartment's roof.

By: **Noor Javed** News reporter, Published on Sat Jun 15 2013

Veronica Ciandre never imagined how drastically technology would change her life.

For more than a decade, the film and television hairstylist had lived comfortably with her teenage daughter on the top floor of 2 Regal Rd., an apartment building near Dufferin and St. Clair. Then, in the fall of 2009, the landlord installed a dozen antennas on the roof as a way to get residents better cellular service.

At first, Ciandre didn't think anything of it.

"I had 10 of the 25 towers directly on my apartment," said Ciandre, 52. "So basically each room in my apartment had an antenna on top of it just six feet away."

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Soon after, the symptoms began. She would wake up in the middle of night, her body tingling. Then came the nausea, dizzy spells lasting for days, short-term memory loss, ringing in her ears. Her daughter, 14 at the time, started to complain of similar symptoms.

"She would tell me that she was hurting in the skin," said Ciandre.

As Ciandre began researching, she realized she had symptoms associated with an environmental condition known as electromagnetic hypersensitivity, whose sufferers experience extreme sensitivity to radiofrequency electromagnetic waves that can come from technology such as cellphones, cell towers, wireless routers and microwaves.

According to the World Health Organization, the prevalence of those with EHS varies significantly around the world, and estimates put the number as low as a few individuals per million in the population. The sensitivity is particularly concentrated in the United Kingdom and Sweden, where according to surveys, 1 to 4 per cent of the population believe they are affected. It is unclear how many people in Canada suffer from EHS.

"Over time, we started feeling like we were living in a slow-cooking microwave," said Ciandre. She realized she had no choice but to move out and ended up couch surfing for months.

Eventually she met Dr. Riina Bray, the medical director of the environmental health clinic at Women's College Hospital, who confirmed her suspicions. Bray has been outspoken on the need for more research and awareness around the condition.

Sweden is the only country in the world to recognize EHS as a functional impairment. Health Canada believes the causes of EHS symptoms are unclear and can't be attributed to radiofrequency radiation.

Gro Harlem Brundtland — the former Norwegian prime minister who served as director-general of the World Health Organization — has revealed that she too suffers from EHS.

"In the beginning I felt local warmth around my ear," she said. "But the agony got worse and turned into a strong discomfort and headaches every time I used a mobile phone . . . It's not the sound, but the waves I react on. My hypersensitivity has gone so far that I even react on mobiles closer to me than about four metres."

Ciandre says that at the peak of her sensitivity, she could detect when the microwave was on in the next room, or when someone walked into the room with a phone turned on.

It has taken Ciandre months to regain the ability to live her life normally, use a computer, a cellphone or even an iPod. At one point she even contemplated packing up her life, moving out to the country and leaving the technology-saturated environment behind — which has become a practice of many in the US and Europe who suffer from an extreme version of EHS.

"I probably would have done it, but I have a teenage daughter, and I didn't want the situation to affect her more than it already has," said Ciandre.

So while she still lives in the city, she said she has had to make changes to adapt, including turning wireless off her phone, plugging in to use the Internet, turning off the circuits of her home at night, and sleeping in an RF canopy. The canopy, which looks a bit like a mosquito net, can keep out radiofrequency energy emissions, Ciandre and many others who suffer from the hypersensitivity believe.

"The best thing would be for the towers to go away, but that's clearly not happening," said Ciandre, who has become a spokeswoman for the grassroots group Citizens 4 Safe

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Technology, and a consultant on the issue. She says she receives a few calls a week from people experiencing what she has. "We need to change our relationship to technology, starting with reducing our dependency on it."

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sendergreen 27 minutes ago

A popup ad appeared on the sidebar next to this story offering for sale "Largest selection of EMF (Electro Magnetic Freequency) meters and detectors in Canada :) Post your humourous responses folks!

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GuyC 52 minutes ago

The most fascinating thing about "electromagnetic hypersensitivity" is that it doesn't seem to matter whether the device is on or off, whether there is current flowing through the wires, or whether they are even connected.

It's almost as if it's entirely psychosomatic.

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1



TimA 27 minutes ago

"It's almost as if it's entirely psychosomatic."

Almost????

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TickedTock 1 hour ago

She should move to an apartment with a brick wall on one side with a stairway and an outer wall with a parking lot or something beside, high up, no antennas, minimize much bothersome and live happily ever after, not that that is possible, but she could try.

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mr. magooX 1 hour ago

So how does this young lady live with the EMF's in her apartment from electrical sources? Does she use a microwave? Does she use a cell phone, pad or computer? What about the EMF's coming from the streetcar lines or the subway? Like someone else said shut off the power to the towers without telling her and I bet she won't feel better at all.

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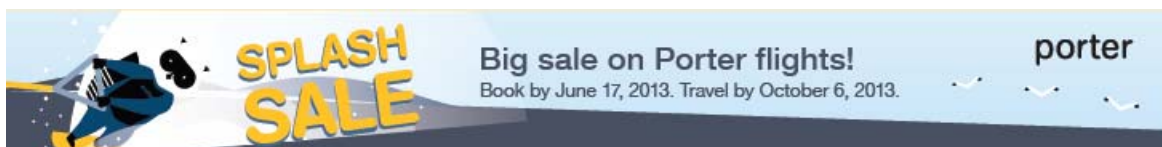
**Bluesguy** 1 hour ago

An antenna, like any radio or television, is simply a receiver. It picks up signals that are already there. The article is not 100% clear on this, but it sounds like the landlord simply put some antennae on the roof. These would not generate ANY RF radiation. Cell towers are different, as they do generate RF when boosting the signal. But, I doubt this is what the landlord did.

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**Fordist** 10 minutes ago

When is a cell tower not a cell tower? Answer...When it is on the roof of a building. Many building owners lease the roofs of their buildings to cell phone companies for sizeable fees. There is a massive one on the roof of a relatively low apartment building at Coxwell and Eastern so it is easily visible from the ground. Check it out.

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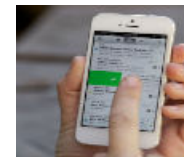
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