It happened to me... I'm allergic to modern life

Former TV producer, Sarah Dacre, 53, had a successful career in London, but, in 1994, she suddenly began suffering from a pattern of mysterious symptoms. When finally diagnosed, her illness forced her to leave both her job and her home. Divorced, with a grown-up son at university, she now lives in Kent. Here she recalls what happened...

I began with the migraines, which I put down to stress. Recently divorced, I was running a television production company, employing more than 70 staff, as well as bringing up my five-year-old son. My lifestyle was fast paced, exciting and affluent, so I wasn’t surprised to find that I might be at risk from a stress-related illness.

As the headaches intensified over the next few months, becoming progressively more frequent, I began to worry, especially as I was also experiencing numbness down the right side of my body and bad digestion. My GP thought I was probably overworking and told me to get some rest.

After consulting an allergy specialist, who said I could be suffering from a food intolerance, I cut out wheat and dairy from my diet in an effort to alleviate my symptoms. But nothing I did seemed to make any difference whatsoever. As I’d never had a serious day’s illness in my life before, I just kept hoping my problems would gradually resolve themselves.

For the next seven years I continued to suffer from severe headaches and digestive problems, both slowly growing worse. Meanwhile, as modern technology improved, I stocked up my office and home with more and more electronic equipment. I had a mobile, two cordless phones and a laptop, but never did I think that these might be contributing to my illness.

Before I became ill I had a wide social circle and was physically fit – my hobbies included skiing, dance, hiking, side walking and going to the gym. Having been such an intensely energetic person, I was shocked to find myself now shuffling around the house after the slightest physical exertion.

In 2002, I met my partner, Rod, an engraver, and although he and my son were incredibly kind and supportive, I hated being a virtual prisoner. By 2003, I’d developed high blood pressure and started suffering from panic attacks and breathlessness. Although I was naturally anxious about all of this, I knew that my problems were more than psychological, and that my condition was being made worse by worry rather than being the result of it.

Obviously it was by now becoming more difficult for me to continue running a company and my health was taking its toll on my money-making abilities and my energy, and to sleep and eat better. Obviously it was by now becoming more difficult for me to continue running a company and my health was taking its toll on my money-making abilities and my energy, and to sleep and eat better.

The following year, hoping to make a fresh start, I moved to a newly built luxury house. Little did I know that I was only making my problem worse. Two weeks after moving in, I found a lump in my breast, which was diagnosed as a benign tumour. Added to this, my hair started to fall out, my teeth had become loose and my fingernails became so cracked and brittle they broke off under the slightest pressure.

Clearly, I could no longer continue working, so I decided to close the company, hoping it would only be a temporary measure. Desperate for help, my son and partner began searching the internet for a solution to my problem. They found websites that warned of the harmful effects of electromagnetic impulses on the human body, and the symptoms listed were all identical to mine – it is called electro-hypersensitivity.

Now I knew what to do. I cleared my bedroom of the phone, TV, computer and electrical wires of any kind, and lined it with foil wallpaper. I also screened the windows with silver radiation-proof fabric, and started wearing a head net to protect against mast emissions. I also began taking numerous nutritional supplements, and avoiding buildings with lots of electronic equipment. Almost immediately, I began to feel better, to have more energy, and to sleep and eat better.

Finally, in 2006, I was diagnosed with EHS by a specialist I found on the internet. The relief of knowing what had caused my mysterious symptoms for 14 years was overwhelming. At last I could prove I was not mad, but ill. But it still remained very hard for me to function in day-to-day life. I could not use, or even be near, mobile phones, microwave ovens, radios, WiFi-enabled computers, or be in public buildings such as airports, railway stations, museums or restaurants; travel on the Tube, or drive on a motorway without triggering symptoms of EHS. I couldn’t once more resume my career in TV without avoiding pulses and eat an organic diet. I walk, garden and work, in a limited fashion, on a laptop, helping people come to terms with their own case of electro-hypersensitivity.

I am now physically stronger and healthier than I have felt in years. I have no income, but am working towards the day when I can perhaps once more resume my career in TV by making a programme about EHS. My mission in life has become to prevent anyone from suffering the way I did. And with our world filled with more and more electronics, there is going to be a lot more people like me out there soon.

Clare Campbell
For information on EHS, visit www.es.uk.info

The more gadgets I owned, the sicker I became. First it was headaches and chronic exhaustion, then my teeth and hair fell out

The regatta, which was first held in 1839, begins Wednesday... It costs £2 million to stage the annual sporting event – 250,000 spectators are expected to attend the 5-day event – 6,500 people are allowed into the VIP Steward’s Enclosure, and there is a waiting list of 1,000 hopefuls... 12,000 pints of Pimm’s are drunk each year and 4,500 bottles of champagne, costing up to £150 each.