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Heavy perfumes bother airplane passengers

By Catharine Hamm,

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Airlines need to tell passengers not to bathe in their stinky perfume. I am not allergic to perfume, but it is torture having to sit near heavy-perfume wearers all through a flight. It's not just women; men are just as bad about using too much. Also, some deodorants are far too strong. Is there any way to get the word out to people?

Based on science and sociology alone, your chances stink when it comes to stopping what you consider an airborne invasion.

But not completely.

Some businesses, schools, even hospitals have instituted fragrance-free policies because they are concerned about reactions to odors. Some people say they suffer from multiple chemical sensitivity, or MCS, whose symptoms can range from a slight headache to terrible allergic reactions. Some scientists, we should note, do not believe in MCS.

Although the policies I read from institutions including Portland State University in Oregon, Cecil College in Maryland, and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston don't outright ban products that have an odor, the language ("discourage," "as a courtesy") in these policies makes it clear that heavy-cologne users don't pass the sniff test. In other words, leave the Axe alone.

Despite the movement in some quarters away from fragrances, you are bumping up against society itself.

"If most of society perceives certain smells and tastes as pleasurable or marketable, how are you going to change society to eliminate all smells and taste?" asks Dr. Bradley Marple, professor and vice chairman of the department of otolaryngology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

If you look at the number of fragrance ads during the holidays, you realize how powerful a force that marketing machine is, which could explain why I can't get Matthew McConaughey, I mean Dolce & Gabbana, out of my mind.

And no doubt about it: The mind does play an important role - and in ways beyond our primitive reaction to odors.



"When we are stressed, we can overreact to smell, fueling our irritability and getting into a negative loop - 'How dare this person do this to me!'" says Debbie Mandel, author of Addicted to Stress.

Stress and flying - now there's a concept.

The only problem is what we do to make everyone happy. Mandel says that "by reframing the experience with kindness and compassion, we can become resilient, adapt and let it go."

And I say that it's yet again a matter of recognizing that being polite means striving not to offend by word or deed, even if we didn't know we were. By seeking not to offend with body odor, perhaps we have swung the pendulum too far the other way. Is it time to dial it down? Makes scents.



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