

# Aspergillus is a fungus all around us

**DEAR DR. DONOHUE:** After coughing up blood, I saw a specialist who did a bronchoscopy to find out what was wrong. An abscess was seen, and I was put on antibiotics for six weeks. They did no good.

-J then had a biopsy, which showed the fungus *Aspergillus*. I was then put on Sporanox.

A month and a half later, a scan showed the fungus had diminished. Three months later a repeat scan showed no change in size.

Will this condition be conquered eventually? Is there anything else that can be done? I've been told the fungus lives in soil. Should I stop gardening? — B.S.

**ANSWER:** *Aspergillus* is all around us. Soil is but one of its breeding grounds. You do not have to give up gardening.

Every person on earth encounters *Aspergillus*. Few become ill as result of that encounter. You were one of the unlucky few.

You're going to meet *Aspergillus* in many

other places, but it's not likely you will have a second illness resulting from that rendezvous.

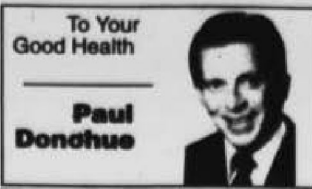
*Aspergillus* on rare occasions is a trouble maker. For some, it causes an allergic asthma attack — which often happens to farmers who enter a barn filled with stored hay. The fungus grows rapidly on such vegetation.

People who have an allergic reaction need to avoid exposure to *Aspergillus*.

You did not have an allergic reaction. You have a so-called fungus ball, a matted mass of fungus. Lung fungus balls can cause bleeding. A little blood in the sputum is not of grave concern. However, the fungus can erode large blood vessels and cause massive bleeding.

The fungus ball is shrinking, slow as that process is. One option, therefore, is to continue Sporanox, an excellent anti-fungal medicine.

If the fungus ball is in an area amenable to



surgery, then surgical removal almost always results in a cure.

**DEAR DR. DONOHUE:** My friend's doctor says she has her electrolytes all messed up. She was hospitalized and is now on multivitamins. What is this condition? Will the vitamins help? — A.Z.

**ANSWER:** Electrolytes are atoms or molecules that carry either a positive or negative charge. Negative charges cancel out positive charges, so the body remains neutral, neither negative nor positive. Diving

into chemistry any deeper can give us headaches, so let's leave it at that.

Sodium, potassium chloride and bicarbonate are common body electrolytes. Vomiting and diarrhea throw the body's electrolyte balance out of whack. And deficits or excesses have to be corrected or major problems can occur, such as an irregular heartbeat.

Vitamins have nothing to do with electrolytes. Your friend must be taking them for some other reason.

While she was hospitalized, the doctors straightened out her electrolyte imbalance, probably by infusing into a vein solutions with the proper balance of electrolytes.

The report on sodium and potassium that I'm sending you sheds more light on electrolytes. Readers can obtain one by writing: Dr. Donohue — SR#2, Box 5539, Riverton, NJ 08077-5539. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped No. 10 envelope and \$3.

**DEAR DR. DONOHUE:** Do you have any information on transverse myelitis? My sis-

ter had it. Is it incurable? My sister now walks with a cane.

**ANSWER:** Transverse myelitis is an inflammation of the spinal cord, which carries nerve cables from the brain and contains its own nerve cells that are essential to muscle function. Inflammation of the cord cuts off nerve transmission to muscles and results in paralysis.

Frequently, a cause of the spinal cord inflammation cannot be found. In some instances, but not in your sister's case, it's an early sign of multiple sclerosis.

One third of patients make a recovery from the cord inflammation with few or no lingering problems. Another third make a fair recovery. The final third can end up incapacitated.

*Dr. Donohue regrets that he is unable to answer individual letters, but he will incorporate them in his column whenever possible. Readers may write him at P.O. Box 5539, Riverton, NJ 08077-5539.*



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