

# Fungus ball in lung sounds worse than it is

**D**EAR 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.

I 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.

**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

## TO YOUR GOOD HEALTH

By Dr. Paul Donohue

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:** Do you have any information on transverse myelitis? My sister had it. She walks with a cane. Is it incurable?

Anonymous

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.

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Eugene Register-Guard Dec 24 1998