

On a lighter note ...

How can I finish 2023? We are finally out of the emergency phase of COVID-19, and the disease is no longer regarded as pandemic, although there still seem to be plenty of new highly transmissible mutations causing infections in the northern hemisphere, with reasonable numbers of people hospitalised in countries like the UK. Africa seems to have escaped this – at least, it is not being reported. The virus is around, but it certainly doesn't seem to be causing severe disease and I haven't seen any reports of new, highly transmissible variants. I'll go really far out on a limb here and suggest that highly vaccinated populations may be driving mutations? Ready to be shot down.

The war in Europe drags on, now massively overwhelmed by public attention to the devastation in the Middle East, launched after Hamas' appalling attack on peaceful Israeli communities on 7 October. I am writing this during the fragile ceasefire to allow Israel and Hamas to release hostages. The thought of the onslaught that has razed Gaza to the ground, killing unprecedented numbers of civilians, starting up again, is too much to bear. I check the international news with fear every morning.

Locally, we struggle on with the continued incompetence and corruption of our government, which is resulting in so much hardship among the majority of our population. With the elections coming up next year there are lots of promises, but people seem finally to be realising that these are largely empty. 2024 may be an interesting year.

And, on a lighter note – I found a lovely article^[1] in *The Conversation* in my inbox this morning, about 'weird and wonderful things lost then found inside the human body'. Doctors in Missouri recently found an intact fly in a patient who had a routine colonoscopy (there are routine colonoscopies?!). How did this survive digestive enzymes

and stomach acid? In Taiwan a spider and its exoskeleton were found inside an ear – apparently a fairly rare occurrence. Although the professor of anatomy who wrote the article says that there is an urban myth that we eat eight spiders a year in our sleep.

The range of inhaled items is a lot wider than I realised – from the familiar toys and beads, to leeches and needles – and this also varies by region. In Middle Eastern, African and Mediterranean countries, inhaled items are typically nuts and seeds, while in China and south-east Asia, particularly around the lunar new year, it is bones and seeds.

Sometimes these inhaled items are unnoticed for years. A postman in England inhaled a playmobile road cone as a child, which was discovered when, at age 47, he had a lung scan for a persistent cough.

And the widest variety of foreign objects are found at the other end – for reasons ranging from the erotic to constipation relief – and include apples, aubergines, brushes, pens, carrots, pesticide containers and a deodorant can. This latter was a fire hazard during surgical removal.

I hope that 2024 is a good and productive year for us all, and that the world and our own country at least start to find a way out of all the madness in the next 12 months.

Bridget Farham

Editor

ugqirha@iafrica.com



1. Taylor A. Weird and wonderful things lost then found inside the human body. *The Conversation*, 24 November 2023. <https://theconversation.com/weird-and-wonderful-things-lost-then-found-inside-the-human-body-217338> (accessed 27 November 2023).