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Answer Fella: Four Sneezes, One Can, Six Pics & Two Hands

Esquire's Answer Fella answers any questions.

By: Answer Fella

Does sneezing -- the sound, the style of suppression or release, or the number of sneezes -- say anything about someone's personality? Since there are anal-retentives, are there also sinus-retentives? And why does the putz who sits next to me at work always sneeze in threes?

While medical science has not probed this aspect of the nose fully and deeply -- "I don't have any information in terms of why someone sneezes one way versus another way," Dr. Clifford Bassett, medical director of Allergy & Asthma Care of New York, tells Answer Fella -- Patti Wood, a body-language maven and erstwhile spokesperson for Benadryl, has blown the lid off the link between your inner you and your *a-choo*.

"Sometimes," she says, "a sneeze can be extraordinarily revealing about personality. With research, we were able to clarify that there are four distinct personalities in sneezing.

"There's the 'driver' personality -- they typically have a really, really big sneeze, but then they're done. There's the more 'expressive' -- it's typically a big show, more likely to be in that triple-sneezer category.

"Then there's the 'correct' -- they want to do the right thing. They'd be more likely to carry Kleenex. The nice people -- the 'supporters' -- are more likely to hold it in.

They don't want to sneeze on anybody. To differentiate, the 'correct' ones are more about being methodical."

It seems as if your office trumpeter is one of Wood's expressive types, or a devout Catholic with a head cold. Or maybe you're shedding. In any case, bless you for asking.

Is toilet water safe to drink?

Not only safe, according to Answer Cur, a beagle mix rescued from a kill shelter in Virginia, but downright tasty. Nondogs, however, should look before they lap.

"It would depend upon the pipes used in the tank," says Philip M. Tierno Jr., the director of clinical microbiology and diagnostic immunology at New York University's Tisch Hospital. "There isn't much metal used these days, so there ordinarily wouldn't be metals leaching out. The biggest problem would be biofilm -- mainly bacterial growth -- coating everything in the tank. But that tank water is probably drinkable in an emergency."

As for imbibing bowl water, don't be a schmuck. "Studies have shown," Tierno notes, "that if salmonella or other pathogens are deposited there from feces, they have the ability to survive in the biofilm despite ordinary cleaning."

And if you're the type of numskull who's hell-bent on living dangerously, AF urges you to at least flush first.

When and why did six people become the standard for a police lineup?

Standard, *shmandard*: Six is typical, yes, but not a rule. "It varies across the country," says Professor Gary L. Wells of Iowa State University, an eyewitness-identification expert. "And there are many jurisdictions that never use live lineups anymore. Most identifications of criminal suspects -- more than 90 percent -- are photographic lineups, arranged in three-by-two arrays.



A number of police departments simply refer to them as 'six-packs' "--not to be confused with what's in the sack atop the dispatcher's desk, right next to the "doughnuts."

Wells dates the police lineup to the early 1900s; before then, he tells AF, "records really do not permit us to know much about what law enforcement was doing." But, Wells adds, "it almost certainly came from British common law -- there really needed to be a test of whether the witness was able to identify a suspect from other people who generally fit that same description."

Could I go from being completely right-handed to being equally coordinated with my left hand? And if so, how long would it take?

According to Paige Kurtz, president of the American Society of Hand Therapists, learning to use your nondominant hand functionally takes "minimally, a couple of months," although to feel "completely comfortable" with it requires "a year or more for most people."

Chris McManus, psychology professor at University College London and author of *Right Hand, Left Hand*, tells AF, "The real question has nothing to do with time; it's all to do with motivation -- how much it matters to you to be able to do it. It depends upon how really, really hard you worked on it."

AF hates to boast, but wishes to add that he himself was honored by the American Society of Hand Therapists back in '04 for achieving functional ambidexterity in record time during Mrs. Fella's annual trip to "visit her mother." It took only two nights and half a jar of Vaseline.

Got a question? Send it to Answer Fella via esquire.com/talk.

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