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Toxin Talk

It's not exactly a new wrinkle in the Botox debate but, yes, it's true: the same toxin used to give people a more youthful look can be deadly in other forms.


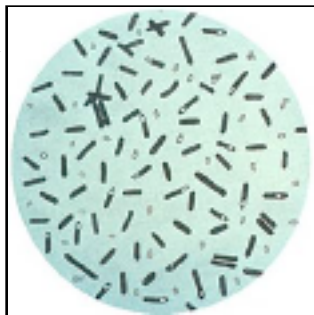
Botox is the brand name for BTX-A, which stands for Botulin Toxin Type A. It works by paralyzing the face muscles, making them flatten and seem less wrinkled. Other types of botulin injections are used to treat muscle spasms, clubfoot and crossed eyes.

Those applications are modern but botulism, the disease related to the botulin toxin, has been making people sick from the beginning of time. It was first studied in 1817 by German physician Justinus Kerner who linked it to contaminated sausage. He called the ailment "sausage poison" which later led to its scientific name, botulism. *Botulus* is Latin for *sausage*.

Today, contaminated food causes only about 15 per cent of all cases, mostly when food isn't properly cooked or the canning process is faulty. Another 20 per cent come from wounds that get infected with the bacteria, and the remaining 65 per cent of cases happen when spores are ingested by infants. That's why infants under the age of one year should never be fed honey. While gathering nectar, bees collect the spores which occur naturally in soil and find their way into various plants. Though most adults have strong enough immune systems to handle the problem, infants don't.

Though modern medicine makes deaths rare, experts say just a little more than a pound of botulin could kill every human on earth. In most cases, symptoms include double or blurred vision, muscle weakness that starts in the upper body and progresses to the legs, and the paralysis of breathing muscles, which is sometimes fatal.

What's frightening is that botulism can stay dormant until conditions



Bad habits are like a comfy chair: easy to get into; hard to get out of!

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are ripe for it to spread most effectively. Microbiologists have found spores hundreds of millions of years old that could "wake up" and start eating again. Botulism must still be taken very seriously.

In many respects, sin is like botulism, starting with the notion that its widely thought to be under control and no big deal these days. In fact, sin is a concept we don't hear much about, outside of church or — in some cases — even inside church. But its been weakening people since the beginning of time, sapping their strength, destroying relationships and leaving many spiritually sick or dead.

According to the Bible, sin is fatal. Much more than a list of things we shouldn't do, sin is a condition, like poisoning. Each of us is infected and, unless we seek treatment by accepting the mercy and forgiveness of God, sin separates us from him for eternity.

We're often infected by sin through what we take in to sustain ourselves, the values, attitudes and behaviours of those around us. Sometimes its our emotional wounds that leave us ripe for infection, through anger, bitterness and resentment toward those who've hurt us. And those young in the faith — whatever their age — are most vulnerable of all, simply because they don't have the depth or maturity to fend off temptation or the half-truths of spiritual toxins.

Once sin incubates, it blurs our vision, distorting the truth about God, ourselves and the people around us. Sometimes sin gives us double vision, enticing us to believe we can have everything we want and still keep God satisfied. That's why Jesus demands we choose. *"No one can serve two masters... You can't serve both God and money."* (Matt. 6:21,24) Or anything else, for that matter.

Sin progressively weakens our righteous resolve and ultimately paralyzes our spirituality, leaving us powerless and weak. Like any opportunistic disease, sin often lies dormant until conditions are ideal. How often have you thought yourself strong and almost invincible, only to have an attitude or old habit reappear and bring you down?

When we get to middle age, some of us embrace various forms of sin to hold onto our youth. But the effects are temporary and illusory and, ultimately, we're all seen for who and what we are. Thank God there's redemption and reality found in Jesus Christ, because regular injections of sin aren't enough to put a whole new face on your life.

Rick Gamble

