

Got a pet tarantula? Then wear eye protection

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The unusual case of a man who had spider hairs stuck in his eye is described in a Case Report in this week's edition of *The Lancet*, written by Dr Zia I Carrim and colleagues, St James's University Hospital, Leeds, UK.

In February 2009, the 29-year-old man presented at the hospital with a 3-week history of a red, watery, and light-sensitive eye. [Antibiotic treatment](#) for presumed conjunctivitis did not clear his symptoms.

Once examined under high magnification lenses, hair-like projections were spotted at varying depths within the cornea. When these details were discussed with the patient, he immediately recalled an incident that had preceded the onset of his symptoms. 3 weeks earlier, he had been cleaning the glass tank of his pet, a Chilean Rose [tarantula](#). While his attention was focused on a stubborn stain, he sensed movement in the terrarium. He turned his head and found that the tarantula, which was in close proximity, had released "a mist of hairs" which hit his eyes and face.

The hairs were too small to be removed even with microforceps, and the man had to be treated with topical steroids; these largely cleared his symptoms and as of August 2009, he complained of only mild discomfort and intermittent floaters (secondary to the inflammation caused by the hairs).

The authors say: "The Chilean Rose tarantula has urticating hairs over the posterior aspect of its body. As a defence mechanism against potential predators, the tarantula will rub its hind legs against its abdomen to dislodge these hairs into the air. Multiple barbs allow the hairs to migrate through ocular tissue as well as other surfaces. The [inflammatory reaction](#) observed is termed ophthalmia nodosa; a broad diagnosis covering the response of the eye to insect or vegetable material."

They conclude: "This case highlights the importance of a collaborative approach between doctor and patient in providing good clinical care. The condition described is rare and the correct diagnosis was made only after we discussed the clinical findings with the patient. Finally, we suggest that tarantula keepers be advised to routinely wear [eye](#) protection when handling these animals."

Provided by Lancet

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