



Tarantula Venom, New Treatment for Muscular Dystrophy?

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They are big, hairy and to many people very scary – but scientists say tarantulas could be a key factor in helping people suffering from muscular dystrophy.

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University of Buffalo biophysicists have found a protein in tarantula venom that shows promise as a potential therapy for MD, which is a group of inherited muscle diseases. Dr. Fredrick Sachs, a professor of physiology and biophysics at the University at Buffalo, and his colleagues discovered the peptide, which is called GsMTx4.

In collaboration with Dr. Eric Hoffman, director of the Wellstone Muscular Dystrophy Center at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Sachs and his team extensively tested the effect of GsMTx4 on mice with muscular dystrophy and found the drug increased muscle strength and caused no deaths or toxicity.

Sachs said the peptide also has potential therapy for several other conditions, such as neuropathic pain and atrial fibrillation. In hopes of advancing the drug to clinical trials, Sachs and his colleagues have formed a biotech company in Buffalo, N.Y. called Rose Pharmaceuticals.

Sachs named the company "Rose," after the pet tarantula that has been living in his lab for nearly 20 years.

Currently, there's no cure for muscular dystrophy, but medications and therapy can help slow the course of the disease.

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