

Creepy Crawler

Lara Cain Gray recounts a hairy moment involving her son.



Illustration by Dean Gorissen

My 10-month-old son ate a spider. Let's not sugar-coat it (although I'm sure that's a delicacy somewhere) – it was frightening and revolting in equal measure.

We'd had a typically hectic morning trying to get our three poppets fed, dressed and off to school and day care. I was on the phone to my mum, buttering toast and fending off the cat, when I noticed a hairy interloper on the wall above the TV. I gestured wildly at my husband while trying not to drop the phone, and arranged for the little blighter to get whacked by a shoe. Unfortunately, we never recovered the body.

The day came and went, then at about 7pm my eldest daughter nonchalantly said, "Muum..." (it never has one syllable any more), "the baby has something in his mouth". I went to investigate and saw he was vaguely chewing, but there was no obvious piece of Lego or Barbie protruding. A wipe of his soft, dribbly cheek revealed a little bit of brown detritus – a piece of grass? Some fluff? No, it was a leg.

My mind flew back to that morning's events. While I tried to compose myself, my baby made a noise like a cat with a fur ball and out splattered a chewed-up ball of huntsman. As I dry-retched and my daughters squealed, my son's quizzical look said, 'Well, it wasn't bad. Needs more salt. Five out of 10,' and off he crawled.

What should a responsible parent do? Wait for parts of him to turn green and hope he uses his radioactive powers for good? Take him to the hospital? If it had been my firstborn we would definitely have gone to the hospital, but you live and learn.

We opted to call 13 HEALTH, Queensland's free medical-information service created to keep people like us out of the emergency department. The nurse stifled her giggles as she asked me to relive the horror of the previous hour. She then calmly diagnosed my son as being perfectly fine. For extra

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reassurance, she suggested I phone the Poisons Information Centre, where another helpful lady told me ingested arachnids were usually quite harmless. In fact, she said, we eat a lot more of them than we realise.

With most of the spider's masticated remains located and no throat blockage or swelling, it seemed my son would be fine. And he was.

It's not a mental picture I will cherish, but stand by for our forthcoming cookbook: *Easy Family Dinners With Eight Legs Or Less*. ●

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