

Crab-like hands as an unusual presentation of rheumatic disease

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Tophaceous gout can present with aggressive tophi causing destruction of the soft tissues, joints, and bones^{1,2}.

A 68-year-old male presented with intense pain in the upper and lower limbs persisting for several weeks. He reported no limb weakness or history of trauma. His medical history included severe tophaceous gout (non-compliant to allopurinol, with uric acid values reaching 11.2 mg/dL), chronic renal insufficiency, and heart failure. His social situation was precarious: he lived in a car, had poor hygiene, and suffered from cachexia and poor nutrition.

On physical examination, he exhibited dehydration and active drainage of gout tophi. The normal anatomy of his hand was lost due to joint destruction and fusion of the interdigital spaces (see Figure 1, Panel A). A giant tophus could also be observed in the first finger of the left hand. He displayed a limited range of motion in the wrists, fingers, and elbows, and mobilization of the knees, ankles, and feet was hindered due to pain.

Blood tests revealed anemia, leucocytosis with neutrophilia, serum creatinine of 2.68 mg/dL, uric acid of 9.3 mg/dL, blood urea nitrogen of 147 mg/dL, and C-reactive protein (CRP) of 15.4 mg/dL. X-rays of the hands (Figure 1, Panel B), elbows, and feet revealed multiple "punched-out" erosions with sclerotic margins, indicative of massive bone and joint destruction. He was admitted to the wards to manage infection and acute renal insufficiency. Appropriate wound dressing was provided, and he was initiated on ceftriaxone 1 g daily, prednisolone 20 mg daily, and allopurinol 100 mg daily. Despite slight improvement in CRP levels and anemia, he began to refuse nutrition, experienced a decline in renal function, and died 10 days after admission.

To the best of our knowledge, this represents an extremely rare case of joint fusion resulting from tophaceous gout, attributed to untreated aggressive disease and challenging social circumstances. In such instances, a multidisciplinary approach that includes healthcare professionals, social workers, and mental health experts is essential.

Tables and Figures



Figure 1. Panel A: A giant tophus is visible on the thumb of the left hand (indicated by the arrow). **Panel B:** X-ray of the hands reveals extensive joint and bone destruction (highlighted by arrows), along with wire structures corresponding to bandages that the patient had kept for several months and was unable to remove for the X-ray.

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