



Patient & Family Guide

2023

Guillain-Barré Syndrome

Halifax Infirmary (HI)



www.nshealth.ca

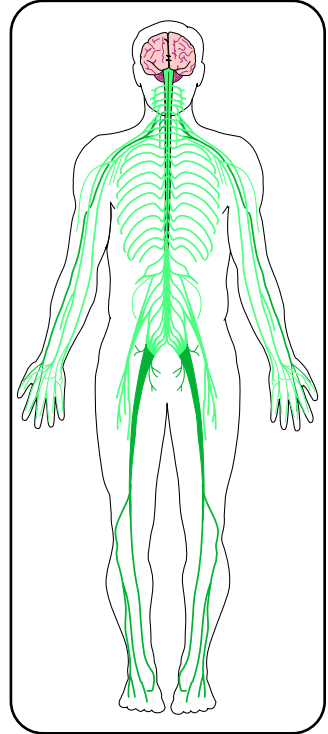
Guillain-Barré Syndrome

What is Guillain-Barré (“ghee-yan bar-ray”) Syndrome (GBS)?

GBS is an illness of the nervous system. It can cause mild weakness to severe (very bad) paralysis (not being able to move).

Most people do not know about GBS until they or someone they know is diagnosed with it.

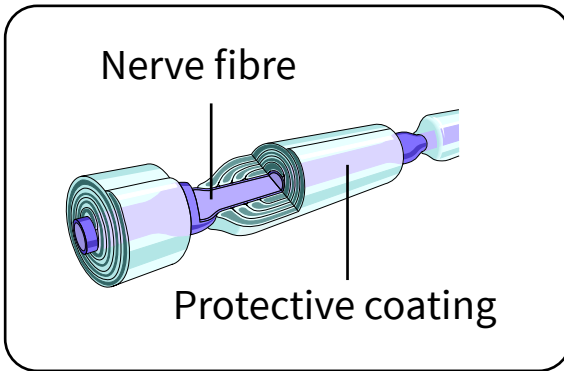
This can be a frightening time for you and your loved one(s). This pamphlet will help you understand what is happening and what to expect in the hospital.



What causes GBS?

The cause of GBS is not known. It often appears several days to weeks after a viral or bacterial infection.

GBS causes your immune system to attack the protective covering around your nerve fibres. As the disease gets worse, your brain signals start to travel along the nerves to your muscles more slowly. This causes muscle weakness that may lead to paralysis.



What are the symptoms of GBS?

- Symptoms can happen quickly over a few hours, or slowly over several weeks. They often work their way up from your legs to your arms.
- The first symptom may be numbness on both sides of your body.
- You may have pain in your legs and lower back.
- You may feel short of breath if the muscles used for breathing are affected.

How is GBS diagnosed?

- Your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) will check for changes in your:
 - › Reflexes
 - › Sense of touch
 - › Muscle strength
- You may have an EMG (electromyography) to check how well your brain signals are travelling along your nerves.
- You may have a lumbar puncture (sometimes called a spinal tap) to take a sample of spinal fluid.

How is GBS treated?

You may have one or both of the following treatments. Most people recover with these treatments.

- **Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG):**
 - › This product is a collection of antibodies. Antibodies help your body fight infection. IVIG helps your body fight infections when your own antibodies are not working well.
 - › It is usually given over 5 days and may need to be repeated.

- **Plasmapheresis**
(also called a plasma exchange):
 - › We will use a needle to remove some of your blood.
 - › We will take out the antibodies that are not working well or are attacking your immune system, and then return blood to your body.

What will happen while I am in the hospital?

- Depending on how bad your illness is and how fast it progresses, you may be admitted to the Neurology Unit or to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).
- You may feel scared, anxious, or depressed. This is common. Your health care team will help you work through your feelings as you recover.
- Your symptoms may get worse before they get better. You will be checked for:
 - › Changes in your heart rate and blood pressure.
 - › Paralysis. In severe cases, you may need a ventilator (a machine that breathes for you) until you are able to breathe on your own.
 - › Trouble peeing. You may or may not have a catheter (thin, hollow tube) to drain urine (pee) from your bladder.

- › Trouble swallowing. You may need to eat foods that are easier to swallow. In severe cases, you may need a feeding tube until you can eat on your own.
- › Constipation (not being able to poop). You may need laxatives and stool softeners (medications to help you poop).

Your health care team is here to support you and your loved one(s). If you have questions, ask a member of your health care team.

Rehabilitation

- Rehabilitation helps you to restore any skills or abilities you may have lost. Your rehabilitation will start while you are in the hospital.
 - › A physiotherapist will work with you to help you keep and build your muscle strength.
 - › An occupational therapist will help you to go back to your usual activities (like bathing and dressing).
- You may need to stay at the Nova Scotia Rehabilitation and Arthritis Centre for a short time. This is to make sure you are able to function on your own as much as possible when you return home.

Resources

GBS/CIDP Foundation of Canada

› www.gbscidp.ca

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.