



Patient & Family Guide
2019

Guillain-Barré Syndrome

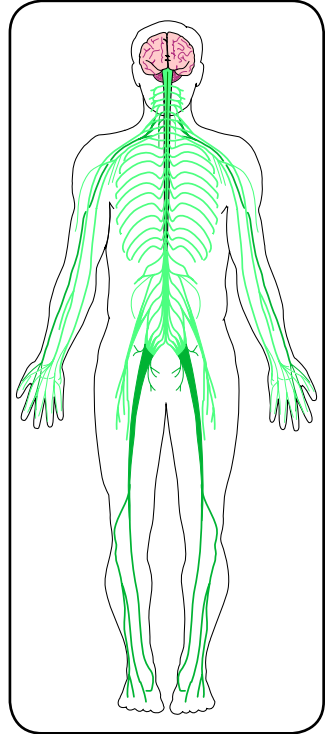


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Guillain-Barré Syndrome (“ghee-yan bar-ray”)

What is Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)?

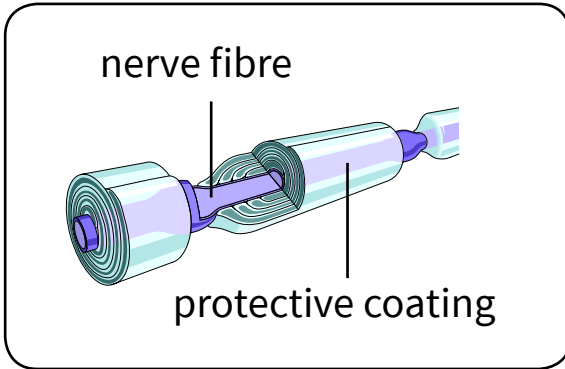
GBS is an illness of the nervous system. The symptoms range from mild weakness to severe paralysis (not being able to move). Most people do not hear of this syndrome until they or someone they know is diagnosed with it. This can be a frightening time for you and your family. This guide will help you understand what is happening and what to expect in hospital.



What causes GBS?

The cause of GBS is not known. It often appears several days to weeks after a viral infection. There is no evidence that GBS is contagious, even for people who have been exposed to the same viral infection.

The body's immune system turns against itself and starts to attack the protective covering around nerve fibres. As the disease progresses, signals start to travel along the nerves more slowly. This results in weakness that may lead to paralysis.



What are the symptoms of GBS?

- The first symptom may be a feeling of numbness. This usually starts in the feet and legs, but may also start in the head and arms. Both sides of the body are affected at the same time.
- Symptoms often work their way up from the legs to the arms.
- Symptoms can happen quickly over a few hours or slowly over several weeks.
- 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?

- The doctor will check for changes in your reflexes, sense of touch, and muscle strength.
- An EMG (electromyography) may be done to check how well your nerves are conducting signals.
- A lumbar puncture may be done to take a sample of spinal fluid, if needed.



How is GBS treated?

You may be treated with one or both of the following treatments. Research has shown that both help with recovery in most people.

- Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG): This product concentrates the part of the blood that fights infection (antibodies). It is usually given over 5 days and may need to be repeated.
- Plasmapheresis: Some of your blood is drawn, the antibodies are removed, and then the blood is transfused back into your body.

What will happen while I'm in the hospital?

Depending on how bad your illness is and how fast it progresses, you may be admitted to either the Neurology Unit or the Intensive Care Unit. It is common to have many feelings at this time, such as fear, anxiety, and/or depression. This is normal. The nurses will help you work through your feelings on your way to recovery.

Sometimes your symptoms may get worse before they get better. You will be checked for:

- › Changes in heart rate and blood pressure.
- › Paralysis that increases from just your legs to your whole body. In severe cases, a machine that breathes for you (a ventilator) may be needed until you are able to breathe on your own again.
- › Trouble passing urine (peeing). A tube may be needed for a short time to drain your bladder.
- › Trouble swallowing. You may need to eat food that is easier to swallow. In severe cases, a feeding tube may be needed until you can eat on your own.
- › Trouble having a bowel movement (constipation). Laxatives and stool softeners may be needed.

During your hospital stay, you and your family will have the support of a number of health professionals. Feel free to ask a staff member any questions you may have at any time during your stay.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation starts while you are in the hospital. A physiotherapist will work with you to help you keep and increase your muscle strength. An occupational therapist will help you to go back to your usual activities, such as bathing and dressing. You may spend more recovery time at the Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre, if needed.

Resources

- GBS/CIDP Foundation of Canada
 - › www.gbscidp.ca

Notes:

Looking for more health information?

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