

What is Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)?

Guillain-Barré (Ghee-YAN Bah-RAY) **Syndrome**, also called acute idiopathic polyneuritis and Landry's ascending paralysis, is an inflammatory disorder of the peripheral nerves, those outside the brain and spinal cord. It is characterized by the rapid onset of weakness and often, paralysis of the legs, arms, breathing muscles and face. Abnormal sensations often accompany the weakness.

Many patients require an intensive care unit during the early course of their illness, especially if support of breathing with a machine is required. Although most people recover, this can take months, and some may have long-term disabilities of varying degrees. Less than 5 percent die. GBS can develop in any person at any age, regardless of gender or ethnic background.

Mission Statement

To improve the quality of life for individuals and families worldwide affected by GBS, CIDP and variants by:

- Providing a network for all patients, their caregivers and families so that GBS or CIDP patients can depend on the Foundation for support and reliable, up-to-date information.
- Providing public and professional educational programs worldwide designed to heighten awareness and improve the understanding and treatment of GBS, CIDP and variants.
- Expanding the Foundation's role in sponsoring research and engaging in patient advocacy.

For more information, please contact:

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GBS

Guillain-Barré Syndrome

Support
Education
Research
Advocacy

Working for a future when no one afflicted with Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP) or variants suffers alone and every patient has a full recovery.

How is GBS Diagnosed?

Quite often, a patient's symptoms and physical exam are sufficient to indicate the diagnosis. The rapid onset of (ascending) weakness, frequently accompanied by abnormal sensations that affect both sides of the body similarly is common. Loss of reflexes, such as the knee jerk, are usually found. To confirm the diagnosis, a lumbar puncture to find elevated fluid protein and electrical tests of nerve and muscle function may be performed.

How is GBS Treated?

Because progression of the disease in its early stages is unpredictable, most newly diagnosed patients are hospitalized, and usually placed in an intensive care unit to monitor breathing and other body functions.

Care involves use of general supportive measures for the paralyzed patient, and also methods specifically designed to speed recovery, especially for those patients with major problems, such as the inability to walk. Plasmapheresis (a blood "cleansing" procedure) and high dose intravenous immune globulins (IVIG) are often helpful to shorten the course of GBS.

Most patients, after their early-on hospital stay and when medically stable, are candidates for a rehabilitation program to help regain muscle strength as nerve supply returns.

What Causes GBS?

The cause of GBS is not known. Perhaps 50 percent of cases occur shortly after a viral or bacterial infection, such as a sore throat or diarrhea. Many cases developed in people who received the 1976 swine flu vaccine. Current theories suggest an auto-immune mechanism, in which the patient's defense system of antibodies and white blood cells are triggered into damaging the nerve covering or insulation, leading to weakness and abnormal sensations.

The GBS/CIDP Foundation International

The organization was founded in 1980 by Estelle and Robert Benson to help others deal with this frightening and potentially catastrophic disorder from which recovery is uncertain. The Foundation has over 174 chapters in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. Its goals are to support you, the GBS patient and family. The Foundation is proud to have on its medical advisory board some of the world's leading experts on GBS, as well as physicians who themselves have had the disorder.

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Need Help?

If you have GBS or know someone who does and would like assistance or information, contact the Foundation. If you would like to form a local support group chapter or learn of local physicians who are familiar with GBS, contact us. If you are a health care professional and would like our literature or emotional support for your patients, feel free to contact us. We are here to serve you.

Services Available

- Centers of Excellence
- Visits to patients by recovered persons
- Comprehensive information booklet "An Overview for the Layperson"
- Patient assistance by local and worldwide chapters
- Names of physicians experienced in GBS
- Newsletters
- Research funding
- Patient advocacy
- International educational symposia for the medical community and general public
- CIDP information
- Visit our web site:
www.gbs-cidp.org