Guillain-Barré Syndrome

Guillain-Barré (ghee-yan bah-ray) syndrome is a disorder in which the body's immune system attacks part of the peripheral nervous system. The first symptoms of this disorder include varying degrees of weakness or tingling sensations in the legs. The weakness and abnormal sensations often spread to the arms and upper body.

These symptoms can increase in intensity until the muscles cannot be used at all and the patient is almost totally paralyzed – considered a medical emergency. The patient is often put on a respirator to assist with breathing.

Most people, however, recover from even the most severe cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome, although some continue to have some degree of weakness.

Guillain-Barré syndrome is rare. It usually occurs a few days or weeks after the patient has had symptoms of a respiratory or gastrointestinal viral infection. Occasionally, surgery or vaccinations will trigger the syndrome. The disorder can develop over the course of hours or days, or it may take up to 3 to 4 weeks.

It is not known why Guillain-Barré strikes some people and not others, or what sets the disease in motion. What scientists do know is that the body's immune system begins to attack the body itself, causing what is known as an autoimmune disease.

There is no known cure for Guillain-Barré syndrome, but therapies can lessen the severity of the illness and accelerate the recovery in most patients. There are also a number of ways to treat the complications of the disease. Currently, plasmapheresis and high-dose immunoglobulin therapy are used.

Scientists are looking at the workings of the immune system to find which cells are responsible for carrying out the attack on the nervous system.

Source: The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
According to the CDC “Current research suggests that Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS), an uncommon sickness of the nervous system, is strongly associated with Zika; however, only a small proportion of people with recent Zika virus infection get GBS”.

GBS/CIDP Foundation International
The Holly Building
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Phone: 610-667-0131, 866-224-3301 (Toll-free)
GBS/CIDP Foundation International offers information and interactive bulletin boards, research funding and a worldwide chapter organization to patients, caregivers and families affected by Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) and Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy (CIDP).

Mayo Clinic: Guillain-Barré Syndrome

MedlinePlus: Guillain-Barré Syndrome

Merck Manual: Guillain-Barré Syndrome

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: Guillain-Barré Syndrome Information Page

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS): Guillaine-Barre Syndrome booklet

Shepherd Center: Rehab for Guillain-Barre
http://www.livingwithcidp.org/
Living with CIDP online support group

Newsletters


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Books—Non-Fiction


- Baier, Sue and Mary Zimmeth Schomaker. Bed Number Ten. New York: CRC Press, 1995. Baier was a Houston housewife and mother of two when GBS left her completely paralyzed for four and a half months.
• Barber, Guylaine. **Guillain-Barré Syndrome: Through the Eyes of a Mother.** Victoria, BC, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2009. Barber’s 17 year old daughter struggled with GBS.

• Brandt, Ann K. **Learning To Walk Again: How Guillain Barré Taught Me to Walk a Different Path.** New York: Writer’s Showcase, 2002. After becoming a GBS patient, Brandt decided to leave her community college teaching position and started writing and liaison work with other GBS patients. This book recounts her personal experience with GBS.


• Heller, Joseph and Speed Vogel. **No Laughing Matter.** New York: G.P. Putnam, 1986. This is novelist Heller’s account of his encounter with GBS. He remained in the hospital for 6 months and left it in a wheelchair. Heller is the author of Catch-22.


• **Immune System Disorders Sourcebook: Basic Information About Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, Guillain-Barré Syndrome,** etc. (Allan R. Cook, editor) Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1997. Lists resources for these diseases.


• Kliewer, Evelyn. **Please, God, Help Me Get Well in Your Spare Time.** Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1979. Kliewer recounts her son Bruce’s Guillain-Barré which started when he was seven.
Langton kept a day-to-day journal of his experience with GBS. His doctors and loved ones also entered their thoughts on his progress.


Lists resources for GBS, especially websites on the disease.


Safranski recounts her husband’s victory over GBS.

Former New York City newspaperman and prize winning magazine editor, Samues tells his own story of medical survival with GBS.


The author developed GBS and writes about the relationships between nurses and patients from observations during his almost three-year hospital stay.


- Wilcox, Dorris R. *No Time for Tears: Transforming Tragedy into Triumph*. Mt. Pleasant, SC: Sea Oats Press, 2000. Wilcox was a successful interior designer when she was stricken with GBS and paralyzed from the neck down. Within 18 months, she achieved 95% recovery and returned to work. The book has a list of resources for those experiencing GBS.


**Books—Fiction**


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