

+ Neurology

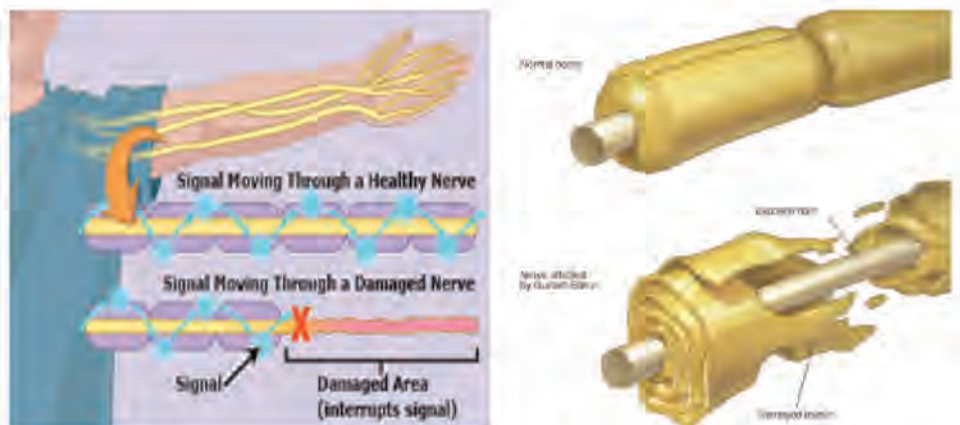


Guillain-Barré Syndrome



What is Guillain Barré

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a rare disorder in which your body's immune system attacks your nerves. Weakness and tingling in your extremities are usually the first symptoms. These sensations can quickly spread, eventually paralyzing your whole body. In its most severe form Guillain-Barré syndrome is a medical emergency. Most people with the condition must be hospitalized to receive treatment. The exact cause of Guillain-Barré syndrome is unknown. But it is often preceded by an infectious illness such as a respiratory infection or the stomach flu.



Symptoms

Symptoms typically last a few weeks, with most individuals recovering without long-term, severe neurological complications.

- The first symptoms of Guillain-Barré syndrome include weakness or tingling sensations. They usually start in the legs, and can spread to the arms and face.
- For some people, these symptoms can lead to paralysis of the legs, arms, or muscles in the face. In 20%–30 % of people, the chest muscles are affected, making it hard to breathe.
- The ability to speak and swallow may become affected in severe cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome. These cases are considered life-threatening, and affected individuals should be treated in intensive-care units.
- Most people recover fully from even the most severe cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome, although some continue to experience weakness.
- Even in the best of settings, 3%–5% of Guillain-Barré syndrome patients die from complications, which can include paralysis of the muscles that control breathing, blood infection, lung clots, or cardiac arrest.

Causes

Guillain-Barré syndrome is often preceded by an infection. This could be a bacterial or viral infection. Guillain-Barré syndrome may also be triggered by vaccine administration or surgery.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is based on symptoms and findings on neurological examination including diminished or loss of deep-tendon reflexes.

- Spinal tap (lumbar puncture). A small amount of fluid is withdrawn from the spinal canal in your lower back. The fluid is tested for a type of change that commonly occurs in people who have Guillain-Barré syndrome.
- Electromyography. Thin-needle electrodes are inserted into the muscles your doctor wants to study. The electrodes measure nerve activity in the muscles.

- Nerve conduction studies. Electrodes are taped to the skin above your nerves. A small shock is passed through the nerve to measure the speed of nerve signals.

Treatment and care

- Plasma exchange (plasmapheresis).

The liquid portion of part of your blood (plasma) is removed and separated from your blood cells. The blood cells are then put back into your body, which manufactures more plasma to make up for what was removed. Plasmapheresis may work by ridding plasma of certain antibodies that contribute to the immune system's attack on the peripheral nerves.

- Immunoglobulin therapy.

Immunoglobulin containing healthy antibodies from blood donors is given through a vein (intravenously). High doses of immunoglobulin can block the damaging antibodies that may contribute to Guillain-Barré syndrome.

You also are likely to be given medication to:

- Relieve pain, which can be severe
- Prevent blood clots, which can develop while you're immobile.

People with Guillain-Barré syndrome need physical help and therapy before and during recovery. Your care may include:

- Movement of your arms and legs by caregivers before recovery, to help keep your muscles flexible and strong.
- Physical therapy during recovery to help you cope with fatigue and regain strength and proper movement.

Key facts

- Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare condition in which a person's immune system attacks the peripheral nerves.
- People of all ages can be affected, but it is more common in adults and in males.
- Most people recover fully from even the most severe cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome.
- Severe cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome are rare, but can result in near-total paralysis.
- Guillain-Barré syndrome is potentially life-threatening. People with Guillain-Barré syndrome should be treated and monitored; some may need intensive care. Treatment includes supportive care and some immunological therapies.

For more information you can contact:

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