



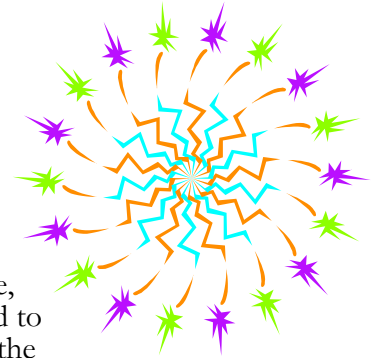
# Guillain-Barré Syndrome

## What is Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)?

Guillain-Barré (**ghee-yan bah-ray**) Syndrome is a disorder of the body's nervous system. The nervous system allows you to control different parts of the body. For example, the brain must send a message to the legs to make them walk. Guillain-Barré Syndrome is caused by the body's immune system attacking the nerves.

Usually, GBS symptoms start in the legs. It begins with feelings of weakness and tingling. It may later affect the arms. These mild symptoms can progress to severe weakness, including weakness of the breathing muscles. If you have problem breathing, you should go to the emergency room right away. Early diagnosis is important. Your doctor will do tests to confirm the condition.

GBS is rare. It does not spread from one person to another. Each year only about one in one hundred thousand people get this condition. Symptoms usually start soon after the person has a viral or bacterial infection. Most people who get a viral or bacterial infection do not get GBS. The GBS symptoms may start days or weeks after having the flu or a case of diarrhea. Sometimes this condition happens after surgery, trauma, or taking a vaccine. No one knows why some people get GBS and others do not.



## Is there any treatment?

There is no cure to reverse the damage done to the nerves. Recovery depends on the body's natural healing process. Early treatment can slow down the attack on the nerves, reduce the amount of nerve damage, and help to speed up the recovery time. Two kinds of treatment are used to try to stop the attack. "Plasmapheresis" is a medical procedure to filter the blood to remove the proteins that attack the nerves. "Intravenous immunoglobulin" (IVIG) is a treatment that adds natural proteins to the body. These natural proteins seem to block the damage caused by the immune system's attack on the nerves. Most people get only one or the other of these treatments. People may still be weak after treatment. They can take part in rehabilitation program to re-learn activities of daily living and to return to community living.

## Will I get better?

Most people are weakest about 2 - 3 weeks after they first get GBS. After that, most people get better. Every person is different. Some can make a complete recovery. People who are very sick may need a machine to help them breathe. They may never get all their strength back. Some take a longer time to recover, while others get better more quickly. Healing may take 3 weeks to 3 years.

## What research is being done?

Doctors are looking for better treatments and ways to prevent GBS. They are trying to answer the question, "Why does the body's natural defense system attack the nerves and cause GBS?"

**Disclaimer:** Information presented on this page is for specific health education purposes only. Persons should consult qualified health professionals regarding specific medical concerns or treatment. Each clinician caring for the patient is responsible for determining the most appropriate care.

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7601 E. Imperial Highway • Downey, CA 90242

1-877 RANCHO-1 • FAX: (562) 402-6690 • Please visit us at <http://www.rancho.org>

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