



REHABILITATION FOR GUILLAIN BARRÉ SYNDROME

Diagnosis, Treatment and Prognosis

Guillain Barré syndrome – pronounced GEE-Yan Buh-GRAY – is a rare condition in which your immune system attacks your nerves. Although several types of the condition occur, in the United States, Guillain Barré syndrome (GBS) most often affects the peripheral nerves that connect your brain and spinal cord to the rest of your body.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

The first symptom is usually weakness or a tingling feeling in your legs that gradually spreads to your upper body.

You may also have:

- Changes in feeling/sensation
- Unsteady walking
- Pain
- Trouble with facial movements that can make it difficult to speak, chew or swallow
- Difficulty breathing
- High or low blood pressure or irregular heart beats
- Paralysis
- Mild cognitive issues

Patients with more severe cases may also experience other problems related to reduced mobility, including:

- Skin sores
- Blood clots
- Bladder or bowel control issues

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE GBS?

The CDC estimates 3,000 to 6,000 Americans develop GBS each year on average. While it can strike anyone, it is most common in older adults and men. Some cases are very mild, while others can result in a patient being paralyzed and/or needing a ventilator to breathe.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE GBS?

While we don't know exactly, GBS is thought to be triggered by different viruses, including recent respiratory infections or stomach virus, and less often post-surgery. Experts are studying whether the recent outbreak of the Zika virus in Central and South America may be linked to a simultaneous rise in cases of GBS.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

It's often difficult to detect GBS in its earliest stages. In addition to signs and symptoms and how a patient feels, doctors will often do a spinal tap (lumbar puncture) and electrical muscle and nerve tests to diagnose GBS.

DO MOST PEOPLE RECOVER?

Yes, most people will make a full recovery, though some may continue to have lingering weakness, numbness or fatigue. In some cases, GBS can lead to irreversible neurological damage, including permanent loss of function or paralysis. The main treatments are IV immunoglobulin therapy and plasma exchange, often coupled with physical therapy to regain strength and movement.

Usually, if the onset of GBS is very fast, recovery is slower, sometime up to one year or more; whereas if the onset is slower, recovery tends to be quicker. Access to immediate and specialized acute and intensive hospital-based and outpatient rehabilitative care is critical, especially for the most severe cases.

"It is a highly complex disorder that requires out-of-the-box thinking, access to medical experts and a suite of comprehensive resources."

*– Ford Vox, M.D., rehabilitation physician
at Shepherd Center*

COMPREHENSIVE AND COLLABORATIVE CARE

Shepherd Center is uniquely equipped to handle even the most severe cases of GBS.

Unlike other rehabilitation settings, Shepherd Center can take patients sooner – even while they are still on a ventilator. The goal is to get patients moving at the earliest opportunity. Our doctors can also rapidly respond when a patient declines by providing repeat immunomodulatory treatments. This means patients receive timely acute medical management without disrupting important strides made in therapy. Up to 5 percent of patients will relapse, usually within the first two months.

Patients have access to a full team of rehabilitation and medical professionals including pulmonologists, physiatrists, physical, occupational and speech therapists, pain specialists, and psychologists.

Patients with GBS greatly benefit from Shepherd Center's comprehensive, specialized services, including:

- **medical services** for relapses and secondary complications;
- **advanced technologies** and activity-based interventions, including locomotor training and neurostimulators to help patients gradually rebuild neuromuscular control;
- **training with adaptive devices**, such as a wheelchair or braces; if needed, patients will be given a portable ventilator that can attach to an electric wheelchairs;

- **speech therapy** for patients who have trouble swallowing or talking ;
- **specialized pain center** with clinicians specifically trained in pain intervention and rehabilitation;
- **psychological counseling** for coping skills and to manage depression or anxiety;
- **recreational therapy** and vocational counseling to help ease the transition back to home and school or work

OUR GOALS FOR EACH PATIENT

Our program provides you with:

- intensive, individualized rehabilitation to maximize your function and independence;
- extensive education for you and your family;
- improved quality of life.

For more information on rehabilitation services at Shepherd Center, visit shepherd.org or call 404-352-2020.