

Guillain-Barré Syndrom (GBS also called AIDP)



Acute inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy

Acute – rapid-onset

Inflammatory

Demyelinating – depletion of the nerves' myelin sheath

Poly – neuro – pathy – many nerves get sick

GBS is an acute autoimmune disorder, i.e. the body's own defence system attacks the nerves. This affects the peripheral nervous system. An important part of the nerves, the myelin sheaths, are inflamed and get destroyed.

The affected nerves can no longer transmit stimuli. Muscles, sensations (sensitivity) and functioning of the organs (such as heart and respiration) are affected. Usually, the nerves in the feet and legs are affected first, then the nerves in the hands and arms.

The following complaints may occur, among others:

- Tingling in the legs and arms. Sensation may be disturbed. Legs and arms can be numb.
- Pain in back, arms and legs. Severe nerve pain or pain in positioning.
- Beginning muscle weakness, which can quickly develop into paralysis.
- Problems to control and coordinate movements. The ability to sit and the sense of balance can be disturbed.
- Paralysis of facial muscles and difficulties swallowing.
- Respiratory problems up to respiratory arrest.
- Problems with the proper functioning of heart, lungs, glands (sweating), bladder and intestines. This happens in case the nerves controlling the bodily organs are affected.

In some patients the condition worsens within a few days. This can lead to complete paralysis. Usually, the low point of the disease is reached four to six weeks after the first symptoms occur. At this point the symptoms do not get any worse. The so-called plateau phase occurs, i.e. a standstill in the disease's development is reached. It neither gets worse nor better. After a few days recovery sets in. Muscle strength, sensations (sensitivity) and organ functions of heart, lungs, glands, bladder and intestines slowly return.

Symptoms as well as the course of the disease vary greatly from person to person. After treatment and rehabilitation, complete recovery is often achieved. Sometimes, however, limitations may remain.

GBS is treated with immunoglobulin or plasmapheresis.

The term Guillain-Barré syndrome also describes a spectrum of rare post-infectious neuropathies that occur in otherwise healthy individuals. This spectrum of neuropathies includes Acute Motor Axonal Neuropathy (AMAN), Acute Motor and Sensory Axonal Neuropathy (AMSAN), Miller Fisher Syndrome (MFS) and other variants.

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