

GUIDE

After GBS — Some Common Problems

This series of guides is produced by the Guillain-Barré Syndrome Support Group. We are a registered charity that supports those affected by the Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) and related conditions in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The related conditions include chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy (CIDP) and Miller Fisher syndrome (MFS).

Our guides are easily downloaded from our Web site at www.gbs.org.uk in PDF format and may be both read and printed using free Adobe Reader software. Alternatively, you can request printed copies from our office.

For information and support, ring our helpline on 0800 374 803

In the Republic of Ireland, call 0044 1529 415278

First published in *After GBS*, edited by Jane Tempest-Roe, Administrator GBS Support Group.

Hygiene and cleanliness

Personal cleanliness for those who are unable to attend themselves fully can be a problem. Many returning home from hospital may have reduced use of their hands, usually temporary, but occasionally permanently. Many will be unable to wash themselves, brush their hair, use the lavatory, wipe their bottoms, brush their teeth, cut their nails etc.

It is important for both hygiene and self-esteem that these matters are attended-to completely. There is no place for modesty here. Even if you are regaining function and attempting these aspects of care, ask for assistance if necessary.

Constipation

Lack of activity or a lazy bowel can cause bowel movements to be irregular and constipation is likely. Occasional treatment with laxatives is one solution, but a far better approach is to modify your diet to avoid constipating food and replacing it with roughage. If this is too much of a culture-shock, consider a bulking agent. You might be able to get this on prescription.

Teeth

Through no fault of their own, many people's teeth are neglected during periods of serious illness. Once you have returned home from hospital, arrange an appointment with your dentist as soon as possible. There may be physical barriers making this difficult, as many surgeries have inadequate access for wheelchairs etc. If this is the case there may be a community dental service available that can help. Using an electric tooth brush can be helpful if you have residual weakness in your hands.

British Society for Disability and Oral Health
www.bsdh.org.uk

Feet

Being at the end of the longest nerves in the body, the feet are often the last to recover. It is important to pay special attention to them so that any problems can be attended to before they get out of hand. Toe nails should be kept trimmed and dead skin removed from between the toes and elsewhere. In-growing toenails can be a problem and should receive attention before any infection sets in.

Swollen ankles and feet should be elevated. TED stockings or intermittent compression therapy may help.

Personal

Some people encounter sexual difficulties following GBS, which can be attributable to residual weakness, nerve damage or depression. Such problems should be discussed with your doctor, who will ascertain whether it is physical or psychogenic, before deciding on an appropriate course of treatment. Often, problems will ameliorate with time, as your general state of health improves.

Come to terms with the fact that you have a problem. Talk to your partner (if you have one). Be open and frank; trying to conceal your problem will only make matters worse.

See your doctor; if necessary, ask for referral to a specialist.

Further information can be read in our guide *Sexual Relationships*.

If after reading this guide you still have anxieties and unanswered questions, telephone our helpline on 0800 374803 (UK) or 0033 1529 415278 (RoI). Alternatively, you can e-mail us or register for support on-line

The GBS Support Group is a registered charity and receives neither government nor Lottery funding. If you have found this guide helpful and would like to help us to continue publishing copies for others affected by GBS and its related conditions, please consider making a donation to the Support Group. Secure donations may be made on line. Alternatively you can request a form from our office.

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