

GUIDE

After GBS — Diet

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

by Christina Robilliard, Nutrition Consultant, Dip ION. Member of BANT. First published in *After GBS*, edited by Jane Tempest-Roe, Administrator GBS Support Group.

During illness, nutritional needs are at their peak, but it is not unusual for patients to lose their appetites or taste for food. Worry and fear often accompany illness and can also contribute to loss of appetite. Good nutrition can be a powerful ally in the process of recovery. If taste has been affected, this will usually improve with time. Plastic utensils can be used if bitter or metallic tastes are experienced whilst eating. Sometimes taste changes can be related to medications, but drugs should not be discontinued without first consulting your GP.

All auto-immune illnesses start in the adrenal glands which produce the body's own steroids. It is vital therefore that they are supported by maintaining an even blood sugar level. This can be achieved by eating small, frequent meals, always containing some form of protein. Stimulants such as tea, coffee and refined products should be kept to a minimum, as these play havoc with blood sugar levels, and ultimately deplete the body of nutrition. Sugar in any form should be avoided. Any food allergies or intolerances will also further challenge an immune system that is out of balance and should be identified, and the offending foods eliminated. The most common culprits in Europe are wheat, dairy products and citrus fruits.

Protein is important for growth, health and recovery. If illness has made red meat less appealing, the following have excellent sources of protein: tuna, mackerel, herring, sardines, salmon, chicken and tofu (these foods are also more beneficial than red meat). Extra meat or fish can be added to soups, casseroles or stews.

An anti-inflammatory diet is recommended, containing many essential fatty acids, known as 'EFAs', found in oily fish, nuts, seeds and their oils and olive oil. The two families of essential fats are Omega 3 and Omega 6. These fats are necessary for the integrity of the myelin sheath that surrounds the nerves (Neuro epidemiology 1992: 11:214-25).

Energy foods are those rich in the B complex, such as whole grains, millet, buckwheat, rye and quinoa, corn, barley and fresh vegetables. Foods rich in vitamin A (such as fruits and vegetables), and vitamin E (avocados, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds) can help to reduce inflammation. Magnesium exists in all green vegetables the darker the better. Zinc is found in eggs, fish, sunflower seeds and lentils. There is copper in brazil nuts, oats, salmon and mushrooms. Bromelain is an anti-inflammatory found in pineapple and nuts. Apples and pears are good fruits to eat as they release their sugar slowly. Strawberries, kiwi fruit and sweet potato are rich in vitamin C. Foods containing bioflavonoids, which support vitamin C production, are found in yellow and green vegetables.

Foods to be avoided are those that interfere with energy production (and with mood). Such foods stimulate adrenalin and ultimately deplete vitality. Examples of these are: alcohol, tea, coffee, fizzy drinks, cakes, biscuits and sweets.

Pro-inflammatory foods are also to be avoided, but for a different reason. These are rich in Pg2, a prostaglandin that promotes inflammation. They include animal and dairy products, margarines (hydrogenated fats), hard fats, fried foods, burnt fats and shortening in pastries, biscuits, cakes and crackers. It has been shown (Lancet 1990 338:37-39) that a low saturated fat diet slows down deterioration of the myelin sheath. Such foods disturb the balance and stop the body making use of the beneficial 'essential' fats, as discussed above.

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

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GBS Support Group, LCC Offices, Eastgate, Sleaford, Lincs, NG34 7EB

Tel: 01529 304615 E-mail: admin@gsb.org.uk Web site: www.gsb.org.uk

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