



An Ayurvedic Management in Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) -A Review Article

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Abstract-Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) is a rare but serious autoimmune neurological disorder leading to acute flaccid paralysis. Modern medicine provides interventions like IVIg and plasma exchange, but these often come with incomplete recovery and long rehabilitation. Ayurveda offers a complementary, holistic approach focused on dosha balance, neuroprotection, and regeneration. This manuscript explores GBS through the lens of Sarvangavata and outlines Ayurvedic diagnostic and therapeutic strategies with reference to classical texts and modern evidence.

Key words-Guilian Barre syndrome, Sarvang gat vatvyadhi,Vat dosh,Neurological Disorder,Majjavaha strotas.

Introduction- GBS is an acute, immune-mediated polyneuropathy typically following viral infections⁽¹⁾. It is characterized by ascending paralysis, a reflexia, sensory disturbances, autonomic dysfunction, and respiratory compromise. GBS typically presents one to two weeks after an immune-triggering event such as a viral or bacterial infection⁽²⁾. The disease begins with weakness and tingling in the lower limbs, often progressing to full paralysis. Sensory disturbances, cranial nerve involvement, autonomic dysfunction, and respiratory failure may follow⁽³⁾. The peak of the disease occurs within 2–4 weeks, with recovery potentially stretching over several months or even years.

Pathologically, GBS is classified into two main types: Acute Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy (AIDP) And Acute Motor Axonal Neuropathy (AMAN)⁽⁴⁾

Supportive Care: Respiratory support (may need mechanical ventilation) · Nutritional support and physiotherapy, Pain management (e.g., gabapentin, NSAIDs)

Immunotherapy Like IVIG (Intravenous Immunoglobulin), First-line therapy, Dose: 2 g/kg over 2–5 days⁽⁵⁾

Despite available therapies, outcomes remain suboptimal, prompting the exploration of integrative care approaches. In Ayurveda, GBS is symptomatically similar to Sarvangagata Vatavyadhi (Generalised Vata Disorder/Systemic Neurological disorder), a condition involving widespread vitiation of Vata dosha⁽⁶⁾. It manifests as motor deficits, speech disturbances, and severe body pain. According to Ayurvedic principles, effective management hinges on understanding the involvement of Vata along with associated doshas and dhatus (body tissues). In Ayurveda, this condition can be correlated with Sarvangagat Vatavyadhi Generalised Vata Disorder/Systemic Neurological disorder), described in Charaka Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya as a manifestation of aggravated Vata affecting the whole body^(7,8). According to Ayurveda, GBS manifests due to Vata dosha vitiation at the mamsa(Muscle), majja(Nervous Tissue), and snayu level (Tendon/Ligament), often involving Kapha in early stages and progressing to Vata-pradhan Avastha⁽⁹⁾. This leads to dysfunction of

Srotas, loss of bala, and neuromuscular incoordination. Sarvangavata Lakshana (Symptoms) from Charaka Samhita: Ruja (Pain), Shosha (Atrophy), Gati Sanga (Motor dysfunction), Sphik uru pada ruk (Pain in hip, thighs, legs), Bhramsha (Falling due to weakness)⁽¹⁰⁾. Vatvyadhi Chikitsa can be Useful as there is Vitiated vata in GBS.

Symptom Can Be correlated as-

Muscle weakness/paralysis (Balakshaya, Stambha). Numbness/tingling (Supti), Areflexia (Chalatva hāni), Facial palsy (Ardita), Breathing difficulty (Uchchvāsapracchvāsa vikshepa), Autonomic disturbances (Vāta dushti in Hṛidaya), Drowsiness, confusion (Tandra/Moha)⁽¹¹⁾.

Management according to Ayurved-

A. Snehan (therapeutic oil massage) -

Role of Snehan in GBS (Ayurvedic Perspective)

Charaka Samhita –

Snehan Is an essential preparatory procedure in Panchakarma used in the management of various Vatavyadhi, including Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) when viewed through the lens of Ayurvedic principles⁽¹²⁾

Role of Snehan in GBS:

1. Vata Shamana (Pacification of Vata)

GBS primarily presents as a Vata-dominant disorder (due to symptoms like numbness, paralysis, pain, and weakness). Snehan helps to lubricate the body tissues, thus reducing Vata aggravation⁽¹³⁾

2. Srotoshodhana (Channel Cleansing)

By unblocking obstructed Srotas (body channels), Snehan helps in restoring normal nerve conduction and neuromuscular coordination.

3. Dhatuposhana (Nourishment of tissues)

Internal and external oleation nourishes Majja Dhātu (nervous tissue) and Mamsa Dhātu (muscle tissue), thereby improving motor function and reducing neurodegeneration⁽¹⁴⁾

4. Vatanulomana (Correcting Vata flow)

It facilitates the proper movement of Apana and Vyana Vayu, essential for nerve and muscle function.

B. Role of Swedana (sudation therapies)

such as Shashtikashali Pinda Sweda, Patrapinda Sweda, and Nadi Sweda with Dashmool Kwath⁽¹⁵⁾

Charaka Samhita –

1. Vata Shamana (Pacification of Vata Dosha):

Swedana induces heat and softness, countering the cold, dry, and stiff qualities of Vata, helping relieve symptoms like stiffness, spasms, and paralysis⁽¹⁶⁾

2. Stambha and Gaurava Harana (Relieves Rigidity and Heaviness):

GBS often causes heaviness, stiffness, and restricted movements — Swedana loosens up tissues, improves neuromuscular flexibility, and reduces rigidity.

3. Srotoshodhana (Clears Channels):

Fomentation opens blocked nerve pathways (Srotas), facilitating free movement of Vata and nourishing elements to reach deeper tissues

C. Basti (medicated oil enema) -

Basti (Medicated Enema) is the most effective Panchakarma therapy for Vata Vyadhi, and hence plays a central role in the Ayurvedic management of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) — which is characterized primarily by Vata dosha aggravation⁽¹⁷⁾.

In GBS, symptoms like paralysis, numbness, tingling, weakness, and loss of coordination reflect deranged Vata at both Sharir (bodily) and Manas (mental) levels. Basti is called "Ardha Chikitsa" (half of all treatments) in Ayurveda for this very reason — its deep action on Vata⁽¹⁸⁾

(Role & Mechanism)

Ayurveda Pathology in GBS → Action of Basti Therapy

Vata vitiation in Majja & Snayu → Basti directly calms Vata in its root site (colon)

Blocked Srotas (nerve channels) → Clears obstructions and restores nerve impulses

D. Shiro Pichu-

Shiropichu is the application of a sterile cotton pad soaked in medicated oil placed on the anterior fontanelle (Bregma) or crown region (vertex of the scalp) and left for a certain period. This oil penetrates slowly and pacifies Vata dosha in the head and upper nervous system⁽¹⁹⁾

GBS Symptoms and Shiropichu Ayurvedic Action-

In Peripheral neuropathy and burning sensation Vatahara, Snigdha (nourishing) shiropichu relieves neuropathic pain

Anxiety, restlessness, Manas dosha shaman (mental balance), improves sleep

Muscle weakness Balya (strengthening), Bruhana (nourishing) oils used

Headache or cranial nerve involvement Shiro shoolahara (headache relief)

Commonly Used Medicated Oils in Shiropichu for GBS

1. Bala Taila – Strengthens nerves, relieves pain
2. Ksheerabala Taila – Excellent for chronic Vata disorders, nourishing and analgesic
3. Dhanvantaram Taila – Used for neuromuscular disorders
4. Ashwagandhadi Taila – Strengthening and rejuvenating⁽²⁰⁾

Duration-7-21 days depends on severity.

E. Shirodhara-

Shirodhara is important Murdhni Taila (head oil therapies) that work on the higher centers of the nervous system, making them especially valuable in Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) from an Ayurvedic neurological perspective. GBS may be understood as a Vata Vyadhi with Manovah Srotas (mind channels) and Majja Dhatu (nervous tissue) involvement. These therapies calm Vata, nourish the brain and nerves, and regulate mental and sensory functions⁽²¹⁾

Mechanism of Action in GBS:

Direct Vata-pacifying effect on the brain and cranial nerves

Enhances Majja dhatu nourishment and cognitive balance

Calms stress, anxiety, insomnia, and tremors

Supports nerve healing and prevents degeneration

Deepana-Pachana agents like Shankha Vati, Chitrakadi Vati, Amchachak Vati⁽²²⁾

F. Rasayanas and Kalpas:

Rasāyana Kalpa can be used in GBS

Rasāyana Kalpa	Probable Action in GBS
Aśvagandhādi Rasāyana	Balya, Mṛdu Vātānulomana, neuro-regenerative ⁽²³⁾
Gudūcī Rasāyana	Immunomodulator, Rasāyana, reduces inflammation
Śatāvarī Rasāyana	Bṛhmaṇa, Dhātu poshaka, strengthens nerves ⁽²⁴⁾
Brahmī Rasāyana	Medhya, promotes myelin repair, reduces anxiety
Amṛtā Rasāyana	Ojas vārdhāna, Rasāyana for immunity
Chyavanaprāśa Avaleha	General Rasāyana, strength, prevents complications
Suvarṇa Mālinī Vasant (in selected cases)	Ojovārdhāka, Rasāyana, immune support
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Suvarṇa Mālinī Vasant (in selected cases) Ojovārdhāka, Rasāyana, immune support

Discussion-Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) is a rapidly progressive, immune-mediated neuropathy that often poses challenges in management due to its unpredictable course and residual disability in many patients⁽²⁶⁾. Although modern medicine provides acute interventions like IVIg and plasma exchange, these therapies are limited by high costs, availability, and variable outcomes, especially in pediatric and resource-constrained settings. This necessitates exploration of integrative and supportive approaches such as Ayurveda, which emphasize root-cause correction, systemic balance, and long-term functional restoration. From an Ayurvedic perspective, GBS can be correlated with Sarvāṅgagata Vatavyādhi, characterized by generalized derangement of Vata dosha affecting the neuromuscular system, Majja Dhātu (nervous tissue), and Snayu (ligaments/nerves). The symptomatic overlap — such as ruja (pain), shosha (muscle wasting), gati sanga (motor dysfunction), bhramsha (weakness and falls), and supti (numbness) — highlights the relevance of this correlation. Importantly, Ayurveda does not treat the symptoms in isolation but addresses the disturbed doshas, dhātus, and srotas simultaneously, thereby providing a comprehensive rehabilitative framework⁽²⁷⁾.

The therapeutic strategies of Ayurveda, particularly Snehan, Swedan, Basti, Shiropichu, and Shirodhara, act on both the peripheral and central manifestations of GBS. For instance, Snehan with medicated oils lubricates the body, pacifies aggravated Vata, and nourishes Majja Dhātu, while Swedan relieves stiffness and facilitates unobstructed nerve conduction. Basti, described as “Ardha Chikitsa,” directly targets the root of Vata imbalance in the Pakvashaya (colon), making it a cornerstone in chronic neurodegenerative and paralytic conditions⁽²⁸⁾. These therapies not only provide symptomatic relief but also enhance neuromuscular recovery and prevent secondary complications such as contractures and wasting.

Furthermore, Murdhni Taila procedures like Shiropichu and Shirodhara extend the therapeutic benefits to the higher centers of the nervous system, addressing both neurological and psychological components. The calmative and nourishing effects of medicated oils reduce anxiety, improve sleep, and strengthen cranial nerve functions, which are often compromised in GBS. Complementary use of Rasayana formulations such as

Ashwagandharishta, Balarishta, and Brahmi Vati add neuroprotective and immunomodulatory dimensions, potentially aiding remyelination and regeneration of nerve tissues.

Another important contribution of Ayurveda is the emphasis on Ahar and Vihar modifications. Vatahara diet (unctuous, warm, easily digestible foods) and lifestyle practices like Yoga, gentle physiotherapy, and Pranayama complement medical treatments by improving circulation, maintaining joint mobility, and supporting psychological resilience during long rehabilitation phases⁽²⁹⁾. These holistic measures bridge the gap between acute crisis management and long-term recovery, areas where modern medicine alone often falls short.

However, it is important to note that Ayurvedic management does not replace emergency interventions such as ventilatory support or immunotherapy in the acute phase. Instead, its role is maximized in the sub-acute and chronic stages, where the focus shifts to rehabilitation, prevention of disability, and enhancement of quality of life. The integration of Ayurveda with conventional care can thus form a synergistic model, optimize patient outcomes while reduce dependency on high-cost interventions.

Despite the encouraging theoretical framework and experiential evidence, there is a pressing need for systematic clinical research. Randomized controlled trials, observational studies, and case documentation are required to validate the efficacy and safety of Ayurvedic therapies in GBS. Exploring biomarkers for neurodegeneration, immunomodulation, and quality-of-life improvement will further strengthen the scientific foundation of integrative care.

Conclusion-Ayurveda offers a promising framework in the management of Guillain-Barré Syndrome, especially in children. With customized therapies, stage-wise care, and holistic healing. Ayurveda interventions can significantly reduce disability and accelerate recovery. This integrative approach warrants further clinical evaluation and could be instrumental in managing complex neurological disorders like GBS⁽³⁰⁾

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