

Study finds link between surgery and Guillain-Barre syndrome

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A new study suggests that having surgery may be linked to developing Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) for people with cancer or autoimmune disorders. The study, published in the November 23, 2016, online issue of *Neurology Clinical Practice*, a medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology, showed that 15 percent of those who developed the syndrome had a surgical procedure within two months prior to developing the disease.

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a rare muscle disorder in which a person's immune system attacks nerve cells, damaging the peripheral nervous system connecting the brain and spine with the rest of the body. Symptoms include muscle weakness that can increase in intensity and in some cases lead to total paralysis. When it interferes with breathing, it can become deadly.

"The results of our study were surprising," said study author Sara Hocker, MD, PhD, of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and member of the American Academy of Neurology. "We did not expect to see a higher percentage of patients who developed the syndrome after having surgery. In addition, our research found that having cancer or autoimmune disease may predispose a person to developing Guillain-Barré syndrome after surgery."

For the study, researchers evaluated the medical records of anyone treated for Guillain-Barré syndrome at the Mayo Clinic over two decades. Of the 208 people treated for GBS, 31 people, or 15 percent,

had developed the syndrome within eight weeks of having a [surgical procedure](#).

Researchers found that people with cancer and those with autoimmune disorders were more likely to develop GBS after surgery. People who had cancer within the past six months were seven times more likely to develop GBS after surgery than those who did not have cancer. People who had pre-existing autoimmune disorders such as ulcerative colitis or type 1 diabetes were five times more likely to develop GBS after surgery than those without [autoimmune disorders](#).

"It's very important to note that the occurrence of Guillain-Barré syndrome is extremely rare after surgery," said Hocker. "Tens of thousands of people had [surgery](#) during the study period, and only a very small number of them developed Guillain-Barré. Still, we found that patients with cancer or autoimmune disease may be more susceptible. More research needs to be done."

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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