

Intensive Care Units – What to Expect

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Hearing a doctor say to you or a loved one that they will be admitted into the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) can be very frightening and overwhelming. This article aims to inform you about what to expect from an ICU environment and hopefully answer some questions you may have.

First, let's discuss why you or your loved one might need to be admitted to the ICU.

GBS can, but not always, affect your ability to breathe properly. Being admitted into the ICU means that you or your loved one requires closer monitoring which will be provided to you by the ICU nurses, respiratory therapists (RT) and intensivists (physicians). The nurse-to-patient ratio in the ICU ranges from 1:1 – 1:2. ICU nurses and respiratory therapists (RT) will closely monitor your GBS symptoms. If your breathing becomes difficult, the ICU nurses, respiratory therapists and intensivist are there to intervene and support you. Many healthcare team members work within the ICU environment. A physiotherapist will help you with range of motion exercises and mobilization. A dietitian will ensure you're getting adequate nutrition, and a social worker will support you and your family.

Now, let's talk about what an ICU room looks like.

Every ICU room has a special bed that provides extra skin protection to help prevent bedsores. You will see a cardiac monitor, which looks like a flat-screen TV. The cardiac monitor will continuously monitor your heart rate, heart rhythm, respiratory rate, blood pressure and oxygen level. You will see an intravenous (IV) pole and a few IV pumps. These IV pumps are used to provide you with IV hydration or IV medication should you need it. You may also see a mechanical ventilator. This machine will assist and support your breathing should it be needed.

Finally, what can you expect from the ICU environment?

ICUs are very busy and can be loud. There are many machines like the cardiac monitor, IV pumps, and the mechanical ventilator that have pre-set alarms. These alarms go off from time to time. Although it can be hard, try not to get too anxious when these alarms sound. The ICU nurses will manage the alarms. The ICU nurses will help you turn and

reposition, assist you with bathing and feeding should it be needed and administer medications you may need. If required, respiratory therapists will assess your breathing and manage the mechanical ventilator. The intensivist will check on you daily and as needed.



A communication tool was created to be used in the ICU by families and healthcare professionals to assist patients who may not be able to communicate verbally. Please find this communication tool under resources on the [website](#). You will also find a sign that can be printed off and given to the ICU nurse to be placed above the head of the bed as a visual reminder to the healthcare team that you or your loved one has GBS, and even though they may not be able to move or communicate they are mentally aware of everything around them.

Helpful tips: Depending on how long your ICU stay will be, ask your ICU nurses what personal items can be brought in from home. For example, your pillow or blanket. A toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush, shampoo, soap and/or an electric razor. Items to help pass the time, such as your phone, tablets, pictures, a small radio, and a clock, may be helpful.

The ICU can seem scary at first, but once you understand why you or your loved one is there, what to expect and the daily routines, hopefully, it won't seem so overwhelming. The healthcare team is there to help and support you through your GBS journey.