

The MGFA mission

is to facilitate the timely diagnosis and optimal care of individuals affected by Myasthenia Gravis and closely related disorders and to improve their lives through programs of patient services, public information, medical research, professional education, advocacy and patient care.



Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America, Inc.

1821 University Ave W, Ste S256
St. Paul, MN 55104-2897

(800) 541-5454
(651) 917-6256
(651) 917-1835 fax

mgfa@myasthenia.org
www.myasthenia.org

Intravenous Immunoglobulins

This publication is intended to provide the reader with general information to be used solely for educational purposes. As such, it does not address individual patient needs, and should not be used as a basis for decision making concerning diagnosis, care, or treatment of any condition. Instead, such decisions should be based upon the advice of a physician or health care professional who is directly familiar with the patient. The information contained in this publication reflects the views of the authors, but not necessarily those of the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America (MGFA). Any reference to a particular product, source, or use does not constitute an endorsement. MGFA, its agents, employees, Directors, Chapters, its Medical/Scientific Advisory Board, and its Nurses Advisory Board or their members make no warranty concerning the information contained in this publication. They specifically disclaim any warranty of merchantability, fitness for any particular purpose, or reliability regarding the information contained herein, and assume no responsibility for any damage or liability resulting from the use of such information.

© Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America, Inc. 2001

*Approved by the MGFA Medical/Scientific
and Nurses Advisory Boards*

*Common questions patients ask
about IVIg therapy for
Myasthenia Gravis.*

Why am I being treated with IVIg?

IVIg might be prescribed for an individual with MG for one of several reasons. The first indication for use might be for a hospitalized patient who is extremely ill and might not be responding adequately to other treatments. Some patients with MG who are being treated with IVIg have improved quickly, thus allowing time for other treatments to begin working. Patients at home who are having significant symptoms in spite of aggressive treatment with other drugs and treatments may be considered for treatment with IVIg also.

What is IVIg?

IVIg is intravenous immune globulin. It is also known as pooled human gamma globulin or simply gamma globulin. IVIg has been used for decades in modern medicine in the treatment of a variety of infectious or inflammatory diseases. In patients who are lacking in the antibodies necessary to fight infection, IVIg replaces those lost antibodies.

IVIg is used also in the treatment of a variety of autoimmune disorders. Over the past two decades, IVIg has been used extensively in the treatment of some autoimmune neurological disorders, including Myasthenia Gravis. There are indications that IVIg is an effective treatment for some patients with autoimmune Myasthenia Gravis.

How does IVIg work?

IVIg seems to effect the function or the production of antibodies in the immune system. The exact mechanism of how IVIg works in successfully treating Myasthenia Gravis and other autoimmune disorders is not entirely understood.

Since IVIg is a blood product, is it safe?

IVIg is felt to be very safe with regard to exposure to infection or viruses. Donors are screened. The processing of IVIg inactivates such infections as HIV and Hepatitis B and C. Nonetheless, it is a human blood product that comes from multiple donors.

Are there adverse effects that occur with IVIg treatments?

For the most part, IVIg is considered quite safe. However, there are several adverse effects that may occur on occasion. Some patients develop headache, chills and aches during the infusion. Slowing the infusion and using medicines to relieve these symptoms may be helpful.

Some patients will experience fatigue, fever or nausea that may persist up to 24 hours after the infusion. Some patients may have migraine headaches, aseptic meningitis, skin reactions or a more severe allergic type reaction. Because IVIg is a highly concentrated protein, it can sometimes interfere with blood flow and clotting.

How is IVIg administered?

IVIg treatments are administered intravenously. The medication is infused slowly over a number of hours. The dose is based on the individual's weight. Many patients are treated with a series of infusions over a period of three to five days. Other patients may have infusion intervals even farther apart. Patients who are treated with long-term maintenance therapy have a single infusion every few weeks.

For some patients, the infusion is given in a physician's office, while others may have it in the home using a home health agency. Patients who are severely weakened are treated in the hospital. A week or two may be required before the patient feels the onset of improvement, although this varies from patient to patient. The duration of improvement from IVIg is usually limited to a few weeks to a few months.

What are other concerns about using IVIg?

IVIg is expensive and this can be a major issue in management. It is important to discuss the cost issues with one's health insurance provider in order to prevent an unforeseen financial dilemma.