

## **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke**

### **NINDS Transverse Myelitis Information Page**

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Condensed from [Transverse Myelitis Fact Sheet](#)

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#### **What is Transverse Myelitis?**

Transverse myelitis is a neurological disorder caused by inflammation across both sides of one level, or segment, of the spinal cord. The segment of the spinal cord at which the damage occurs determines which parts of the body are affected. Damage at one segment will affect function at that segment and segments below it. In people with transverse myelitis, inflammation usually occurs at the thoracic (upper back) level, causing problems with leg movement and bowel and bladder control, which require signals from the lower segments of the spinal cord. What usually begins as a sudden onset of lower back pain, muscle weakness, or abnormal sensations in the toes and feet can rapidly progress to more severe symptoms, including paralysis, urinary retention, and loss of bowel control.

#### **Is there any treatment?**

No effective cure currently exists for people with transverse myelitis. Physicians often prescribe corticosteroid therapy during the first few weeks of illness to decrease inflammation. Following initial therapy, the most critical part of the treatment for this disorder consists of keeping the patient's body functioning while hoping for either complete or partial spontaneous recovery of the nervous system. If an individual begins to recover limb control, physical therapy begins to help improve muscle strength, coordination, and range of motion.

#### **What is the prognosis?**

Recovery from transverse myelitis usually begins within 2 to 12 weeks of the onset of symptoms and may continue for up to 2 years. However, if there is no improvement within the first 3 to 6 months, significant recovery is unlikely. About one-third of people affected with transverse myelitis experience good or full recovery from their symptoms. Another one-third show only fair recovery and are left with significant deficits. The remaining one-third show no recovery at all, with marked dependence on others for basic functions of daily living.

#### **What research is being done?**

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) conducts research related to transverse myelitis in its laboratories at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and also supports additional transverse myelitis research through grants to major medical institutions across the country. Some studies focus on strategies to repair the spinal cord, including approaches using cell transplantation. The NINDS also funds researchers who are using animal models of spinal cord injury to study strategies for replacement or regeneration of spinal cord nerve cells. The knowledge gained from such research should lead to a greater knowledge of the mechanisms responsible for transverse myelitis and may ultimately provide a means to prevent and treat this disorder.

[Select this link](#) to view a list of studies currently seeking patients.

## **Organizations**

#### **Transverse Myelitis Association**

1787 Sutter Parkway  
Powell, OH 43065-8806  
[info@myelitis.org](mailto:info@myelitis.org)  
<http://www.myelitis.org>  
Tel: 614-766-1806

#### **American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA)**

P.O. Box 850  
Rocklin, CA 95677-0850  
[ACPA@pacbell.net](mailto:ACPA@pacbell.net)  
<http://www.theacpa.org>  
Tel: 916-632-0922 800-533-3231  
Fax: 916-632-3208

#### **Miami Project to Cure Paralysis/ Buoniconti Fund**

P.O. Box 016960  
R-48  
Miami, FL 33101-6960  
[mpinfo@miamiproject.med.miami.edu](mailto:mpinfo@miamiproject.med.miami.edu)  
<http://www.themiamiproject.org>  
Tel: 305-243-6001 800-STANDUP (782-6387)  
Fax: 305-243-6017

#### **National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC)**

4200 Forbes Boulevard  
Suite 202  
Lanham, MD 20706-4829  
[naricinfo@heitechservices.com](mailto:naricinfo@heitechservices.com)  
<http://www.naric.com>  
Tel: 301-459-5900/301-459-5984 (TTY) 800-346-2742  
Fax: 301-562-2401

## **Publicaciones en Español**

■ [La Mielitis Transversa](#)

Prepared by:  
Office of Communications and Public Liaison  
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke  
National Institutes of Health  
Bethesda, MD 20892

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