So, you have Mono
Taking the Next Step

Information from the American College Health Association

Mononucleosis (commonly called "mono") is a viral infection that is common in adolescents and young adults. In fact, nearly everyone gets it eventually.

Don't let the mere mention of mono bring to mind horrors such as months of best rest, quarantine from roommates and friends, or dropping out for the semester! The following information will help you to better understand what mono really is and how to treat it.

What is Mononucleosis?

- Mono is a group of symptoms (fever, sore throat, fatigue) that is usually caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) in 90% of cases. Occasionally it may be caused by other viruses such as cytomegalovirus (CMV).
- Most children and young adults have already had the disease and are immune by the time they enter college. Up to 95% of the population has evidence of prior mono infections by the age of 35-40.
- Mono is spread through intimate contact with saliva--- hence its nickname, the "kissing disease".
- The virus is frequently found in the saliva of health people who had EBV infection in the past. For life, they can intermittently spread the virus without any signs of disease. These people are usually the main reservoir for person-to-person transmission.

What Are the Symptoms?

- Early symptoms can include fever without a clear source, nausea or loss of appetite, and headaches.
- It may take four to six weeks from when a person is infected with the virus to when symptoms develop.
- As the illness progresses, most patients will get a very bad sore throat.
- Fatigue is a common symptom but usually only after the initial infection.
- Fever is the most prominent and frequent early symptom.
- Swollen lymph nodes (glands) in your neck and armpits may emerge.
- Enlargement of the spleen occurs in approximately half of mono patients.
- Symptoms tend to be mild in children and more severe in adolescents and young adults.
- Inflammation of the liver may occur with mono. This inflammation can worsen the appetite and even make a person jaundiced (skin and whites of the eyes appear yellow).
How Do I know if I Have Mono?

- If your symptoms resemble the ones described here, it doesn't necessarily mean you have mono.
- Mononucleosis, especially during the early stages, can look like many other diseases, including strep throat or influenza.
- Only your health care provider can determine if you have mononucleosis.
- Occasionally, you may test negative for mono early in the disease even though you have the infection. If your symptoms continue to suggest that you have mono, your health care provider may repeat the tests or order more sophisticated blood tests to confirm that you have mononucleosis.
- Once the diagnosis of mono is confirmed, it would be best to notify your academic advisor, in case your illness impacts your academic participation.
- For athletes, testing is even more important as enlargement of the spleen can put an athlete at risk for splenic rupture, especially when engaging in contact sports (see "Complications from Mono").

How is Mono Treated?

- There is no specific treatment for mononucleosis. In order to get better as quickly as possible, you need to take care of yourself so your immune system can fight the infection.
- Antibiotics are NOT useful in treating viral diseases such as mono.
- You will need plenty of rest (8 to 10 hours of sleep a night).
- Medications such as ibuprofen or naproxen are helpful for your fever, sore throat, and other aches and pains. Do not use aspirin if you are 18 years old or younger because of the risk of Reyes Syndrome.
- It is important to drink plenty of liquids, even though you may not have a good appetite. Soup broth, sports drinks, and rehydration fluids supply these nutrients. Popsicles, sodas, and flavored ices as well as just water are also excellent ways to stay hydrated.

How Long Does Mono Last?

- If your symptoms do keep you in bed, you should be feeling better within one to two weeks.
- The fever usually resolves in 10 days.
- Swollen lymph glands and spleen heal in four weeks.
- Symptoms of fatigue may last longer --- up to two to three months.
Complications from Mono

- Some patients may develop streptococcal infections in the throat (strep throat) due to the mono. Antibiotics can treat strep throat but are not effective against viral infection. Your strep throat will improve, but you will still have other symptoms of mono, such as fatigue.

- If you find you are having difficulty swallowing and end up "spitting" your saliva, this is an indication that you need emergency treatment immediately. You should also seek immediate medical care if you are unable to swallow or are having any difficulty breathing.

- Enlargement of the spleen occurs in approximately half of all patients who have mono. Very rarely, the spleen can rupture and cause bleeding in your abdomen. Nearly all of these ruptures are due to trauma to the abdomen from punches, contact sports, or falls. Your provider may restrict your activity because of the risk of splenic rupture during the first four weeks or so of your illness.

Returning to Your Usual Activities

- The most important things to do while recovering are get proper rest, eat well, drink lots of fluids, and take good care of yourself. Although the illness is often gone in two weeks, it can take longer to get back to your normal energy level.

- Fatigue can sometimes last for two or three months beyond the acute stage of mono. Make sure to get regular rest, but don't let fatigue alone keep you bedridden. This will only allow your body to become weaker.

- Follow your health care provider's advice before resuming sports or exercise if your spleen is enlarged.

For More Information

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[www.cdc.gov/epstein-barr](http://www.cdc.gov/epstein-barr)

**U.S. National Library of Medicine/National Institutes of Health**


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