

MANAGING YOUR MONONUCLEOSIS

What Is Mononucleosis?

Mononucleosis, also called mono and kissing disease, is an acute infection affecting the respiratory system, liver, and lymphatic system. It spreads by close contact. It's common in adolescents and young adults and rare in people older than 35. It's usually harmless and goes away by itself. Rarely, it becomes serious and causes major fatigue, so people miss weeks of school or work. The most serious complication is the spleen becoming swollen. It may burst if hit by direct contact, such as while playing contact sports.

What Causes Mononucleosis?

The cause is the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). The virus spreads through saliva, such as by kissing, coughing, or sharing food or utensils with someone who's infected. The virus can also be transmitted through mucus, blood, semen, or vaginal secretions.

What Are the Symptoms of Mononucleosis?

Most important symptoms are fever, sore throat, and swollen and sore glands, especially in the neck. Headache, joint and muscle pain, general body aches, loss of appetite, feeling sick, puffy eyes, rash, stomach fullness or pain, severe tiredness (sleeping 12 to 16 hours daily), abdominal pain, and yellow skin may also occur.

Fever, body aches, and sore throat usually go away after 1 to 4 weeks. If the spleen got large, 6 weeks may be needed before it becomes normal and risk of bursting goes away. People may feel tired for several months after having mononucleosis. Sometimes tonsils get large and can cause breathing problems.

How Is Mononucleosis Diagnosed?

The health care provider takes a medical history and does an examination, with special attention to the neck, throat, and abdomen. Blood tests and maybe throat cultures are done to be sure of the diagnosis and exclude other diseases.

How Is Mononucleosis Treated?

Most cases get better by themselves. Antibiotics don't work because a virus is the cause. Bed rest and good nutrition are the best treatment. No special diet is needed. For muscle aches and minor discomfort, ibuprofen or naproxen is used. Children younger than 16 years shouldn't take aspirin because of the risk of Reye syndrome. For severe throat inflammation, anti-inflammatory steroids may be prescribed. Recovery takes 10 days to months.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Mononucleosis

- ✓ **DO** get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider about all your medicines, including prescription and nonprescription.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider if your symptoms get worse or don't get better after 2 weeks.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider if you have stomach or shoulder pain.
- ✓ **DO** get your doctor's OK to lift heavy weights or play contact sports.
- ✓ **DO** arrange for schoolwork to be done at home, if needed.
- ✓ **DO** avoid kissing or sharing food or utensils with someone who's sick. Wash your hands often.

- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your temperature is higher than 102° F.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have trouble swallowing or breathing, are constipated and strain during bowel movements, or get sudden severe abdominal pain.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have a severe headache, neck pain, or stiffness.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink alcohol.
- ⊗ **DON'T** play contact sports.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give your child aspirin because of the chance of Reye syndrome. Reye syndrome causes organ failure, especially affecting the brain and liver. Its symptoms usually start with vomiting.

FROM THE DESK OF

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- The Infectious Diseases Society of America: Tel: (703) 299-0200; Website:
<http://www.idsociety.org>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tel: (800) 232-4636; Website:
<http://www.cdc.gov>

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