

## Infectious Mononucleosis (Mono)

### Description

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Mononucleosis ("mono") is caused by a virus in the herpes family called the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). Infectious mononucleosis may occur in childhood, adolescence or adulthood. In the United States, as many as 95% of adults between 35-40 years old have been infected with EBV. Adolescents and adults who become EBV infected usually develop symptoms that are interpreted as a cold or flu. EBV is a virus which lives inside of the body for life once a person acquires it. Reactivation of the virus is usually subclinical and there are no symptoms. It is most common in people 15-35 years old.

### Symptoms

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A mild case of mono may be mistaken as a cold or the flu. Patients may have all or only some of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Poor appetite
- Enlarged lymph nodes in the neck

In 10% of patients, a faint rash may appear early in the illness. All patients have some enlargement of the spleen and another 50% have enlargement of the liver. Symptoms typically last between 2-3 weeks.

### Transmission

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Once in the body, EBV exists in the secretions of the nose and mouth. Transmission occurs through direct and occasionally indirect contact with an infected person. Activities like kissing and/or sharing eating utensils or drinking containers with a person infected with EBV will put a person at risk. From the time of transmission, it takes 4-6 weeks for symptoms to appear.

*Roommates and close friends of someone infected with EBV seldom get the virus unless the above activities occur.*

### Diagnosis

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Laboratory tests are required to confirm an infectious mononucleosis diagnosis. If symptoms indicate the possibility of this infection, a medical provider may order the following:

*Complete Blood Count (CBC)* - reveals if you have an increase in atypical lymphocytes (a type of white blood cell that increases during EBV infections).

*Monoscreen* - tests for presence of infectious mononucleosis antibodies in blood serum.

Sometimes symptoms, signs and the blood count may indicate mono even though a positive monoscreen never appears. These mono indicators may not appear in lab tests until 7-10 days after symptoms first occur. So, if mono symptoms persist after initial negative lab results, your medical provider may want to order repeat lab tests.

### Treatment

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Viruses do not respond to antibiotics and therefore such therapy is not prescribed. If a throat culture reveals a secondary bacterial infection, then an antibiotic like penicillin will be prescribed. This antibiotic will have no effect on the EBV.

Treatment for mono includes:

- Bed rest
- Balanced diet

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- Increased fluid intake
- Saltwater gargles
- Throat lozenges
- Aspirin or Tylenol
- Some physical activity is fine

Mono patients may have some degree of spleen enlargement and are therefore at risk for rupture (breaking open) of the spleen. This is a rare complication that can occur spontaneously, although trauma increases the risk. As a result, people with mono should avoid contact or collision sports for 4 weeks, jogging, or heavy lifting for 6 weeks. If you experience belly pain, you should seek medical evaluation immediately, as this could be a sign of a ruptured spleen.

Although liver enlargement occurs in only a small percentage of mono patients, most mono sufferers have abnormal liver function for several weeks. For this reason, it is recommended that mono patients avoid alcohol consumption until symptoms resolve. Occasionally severe edema (swelling) of the tonsils and throat occurs. In this case, your medical provider will recommend appropriate treatment.

**Prevention**

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To prevent getting infected with EBV, avoid direct (i.e., kissing) and indirect (i.e., sharing utensils) contact with an infected person. Maintain good health and help guard against getting infected by getting a good night's sleep every night, eating three, nutritious and well-balanced meals a day and exercising at least three times a week. These measures will provide your immune system with the necessary tools to function at its best and keep you healthy.

**For More Information:**

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