



Mono:

At least you only get it once!

by Monica Hamburg, MD



It's no longer called "the kissing disease" as mono can spread by sharing a water bottle, etc. just as easily...



Mono, or *infectious mononucleosis*, causes fever, sore throat and swollen glands, as well as severe fatigue. It is usually caused by a virus called **EBV** (Epstein-Barr Virus), and rarely by other viruses. It cannot be treated with antibiotics. It eventually resolves on its own, but, unfortunately, it can cause severe fatigue and loss of time from school and sports.

Teenagers are usually the ones who get this “kissing disease” – not because you can only get it by kissing (you can get it through any close contact of saliva – sharing cups, utensils, etc.) but because younger kids who get *EBV* usually don't get *mono* symptoms. The peak age to get *mono* is age 15-24. Once you get *EBV* you are immune for life (although you can still get *mono* from these other rare viruses).

Patients with *mono* may get a generally sick feeling, headache, and low-grade fever then gradually sore throat, high fevers, swollen neck glands and fatigue set in. The “sick” feeling may last just 2-3 weeks, but occasionally the fatigue can last for months. With the sore throat, some patients have white or red spots on their throat and tonsils, just like with strep throat, but unlike strep throat, *mono* cannot be treated by an antibiotic.

In some cases, the sore throat and tonsil swelling is so severe that prednisone by mouth may be prescribed to help reduce the swelling. Another problem that can arise in half of *mono* patients is swelling of the spleen (an organ in the left upper part of the abdomen). This is why we advise **NO SPORTS** or heavy lifting when a patient has *mono*. If they are accidentally hit in the stomach, especially during the first 3 weeks of illness, their spleen could rupture, which can cause life-threatening internal bleeding! Occasionally rupture can occur spontaneously even without getting hit in the abdomen – any *mono* patient with sudden, severe abdominal pain needs immediate medical attention!

Patients with *mono* need lots of rest, fluids and pain/fever control. It is safe to take acetaminophen (*Tylenol*), but follow dosing instructions exactly. Acetaminophen can affect the liver which may already be inflamed from *mono*. Ibuprofen (*Motrin* or *Advil*) will also be helpful. Never give a child or teenager aspirin as this can cause severe liver problems even if they don't have *mono*! College patients should be aware that alcohol is very dangerous for people with *mono* due to liver inflammation, don't drink!

We can test for *mono* in the office using a blood test. The test doesn't pick up everyone with *mono*, so your doctor may diagnose you even if the test was negative. We test for *mono* even though we can't cure it in order to plan what to do next with your child. If your child does have *mono*, they should stay out of school until they have no fever and are feeling better, and stay out of sports for at least 3-4 weeks, depending on what your doctor advises you. *Mono* is only spread by secretion contact, so careful handwashing. If you are diagnosed with *mono*, your

doctor will want to see you back in the office for scheduled follow-up visits until your doctor feels your child is better. Your child can resume sports only once your doctor says he/she can, and he/she should start slowly and gradually.

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