

Mono: Symptoms and Treatment



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Mononucleosis (mono) is a viral infection that is common in teens and young adults. It is not usually a serious illness, but it can cause symptoms or complications that are more severe and may limit your normal activities for several weeks. The following information will help you understand what mono is and how to treat it.

What is Mononucleosis?

- Mono is usually caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). Occasionally, other viruses may also cause mono.
- Most children and young adults have already had the disease and are immune by the time they enter college.
- Mono is commonly spread through saliva—hence its nickname, the “kissing disease.” It can also be spread by sharing food, drinks, or silverware with a person who has mono, as well as through the coughing or sneezing of an infected person.
- People who had EBV infection in the past can occasionally spread the virus without any signs of disease.

What Are the Symptoms?

It may take four to six weeks from when a person is infected with the virus to when symptoms develop.

Early symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Head and body aches
- Sore throat (can be a severe sore throat)
- Fatigue
- Swollen lymph nodes (glands) in your neck and armpits

Less common symptoms include:

- Skin rash
- Swollen spleen
- Swollen liver, which may result in jaundice (skin and whites of the eyes appear yellow)

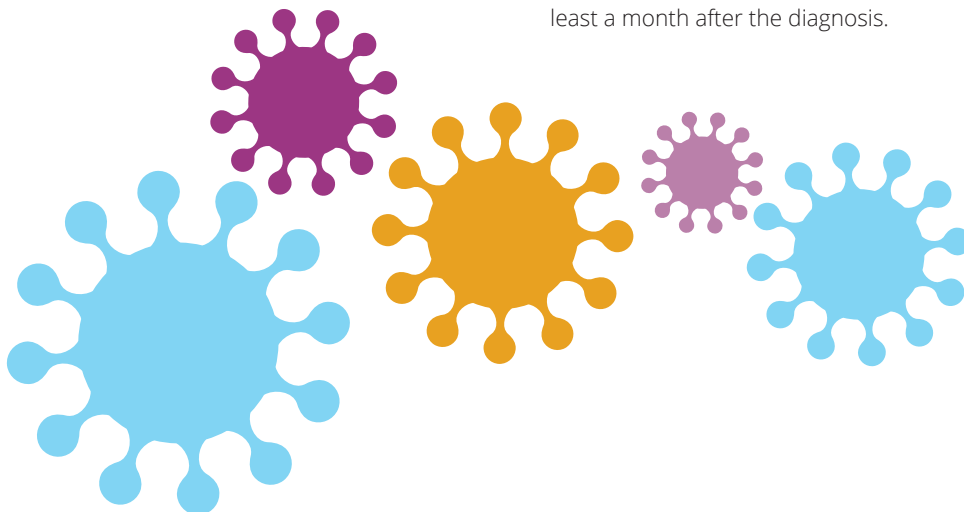
How Do I Know if I Have Mono?

- Mono, especially during the early stages, can look like many other diseases, including strep throat or influenza (flu). If you have some of the symptoms described here, it doesn't necessarily mean you have mono.
- Only your health care provider can determine if you have mono. They may need to perform a blood test to tell if you have mono.
- Occasionally, you may test negative for mono if you haven't been infected for very long. If this happens and you continue to have symptoms of mono, your health care provider may test you again.
- If you are diagnosed with mono, notify your academic advisor in case your illness impacts your academic participation.
- For athletes, testing is even more important because they are more at risk for a ruptured spleen, especially when participating in contact sports (see “Complications from Mono”).

How Is Mono Treated?

There is no specific treatment for mono. Antibiotics are NOT useful in treating viral infections like mono. To get better as quickly as possible, you need to take care of yourself so your immune system can fight the infection:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Take over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, or aspirin for your fever, sore throat, and other aches and pains (do not take acetaminophen because of a possible inflamed liver).
- Drink plenty of liquids to stay hydrated.
- If your appetite is decreased, eat small amounts of food frequently.
- Because mono can cause an inflamed liver, avoid alcohol or drugs not prescribed by your health care provider.
- Because mono can cause an enlarged spleen (that could be at risk for bursting or rupturing), avoid sports and activity for at least a month after the diagnosis.



How Long Does Mono Last?

- If your symptoms keep you in bed, you should be feeling better within 1–2 weeks.
- The fever usually resolves in 10 days.
- Swollen lymph glands and spleen heal in four weeks.
- Symptoms of fatigue may last up to 2–3 months.

Complications from Mono

See a health care provider if:

- You have a severe sore throat. Strep throat commonly occurs with mono. Antibiotics can treat strep throat but won't help with other symptoms of mono (because mono is caused by a virus).
- You are having difficulty breathing or swallowing. This is a sign you may have enlarged tonsils.
- You feel a sudden, sharp, severe pain in your left side in the upper abdomen. This could mean you have a ruptured spleen. Seek medical treatment immediately if you have mono and experience this kind of pain.

Returning to Your Usual Activities

- Although the illness is often gone in two weeks, it can take longer to get back to your normal energy level.
- 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

U.S. National Library of Medicine

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/infectiousmononucleosis.html

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