



Fact Sheet

2005

Student Health Services Texas A&M University

Mononucleosis

What is mononucleosis?

Mononucleosis (“mono”) is an infection caused by the Epstein-Barr virus. Signs of mononucleosis include fever, sore throat, headaches, white patches on the back of your throat, swollen glands in your neck, feeling tired and not feeling hungry.

How is mononucleosis passed?

The virus is found in saliva and mucus. It can be passed from one person to another through coughing, sneezing and kissing. Signs of mononucleosis usually develop four to seven weeks after you’re exposed to the virus. Generally, people only get mononucleosis once. It’s most common among people 15 to 35 years old.

How is mononucleosis diagnosed?

Your doctor will probably first ask you some questions about your symptoms and then may do blood tests to confirm the diagnosis. One common test used to diagnose mononucleosis is called the Monospot test. Sometimes other blood tests are needed if the results of the Monospot test aren’t clear.

Does mononucleosis have any complications?

Sometimes. The main serious concern with mononucleosis is that the spleen will enlarge and even rupture (tear open). The spleen is like a large gland. It’s located in the upper part of your abdomen on the left side. It has functions that relate to your blood.

Although a ruptured spleen is rare in people with mononucleosis, it’s wise to be aware of the signs and call your doctor right away if you notice any of them. Signs of a ruptured spleen include pain in the left upper part of your abdomen (under the left chest), feeling lightheaded, feeling like your heart is beating fast and hard, bleeding more easily than usual, and having trouble breathing.

Can mononucleosis be cured?

No. But mononucleosis will go away on its own. Symptoms usually last about four weeks.

How is mononucleosis treated?

The main point of treatment is to relieve your symptoms. The following list includes tips on treatment.

- ☞ Rest
- ☞ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ☞ If you have a sore throat, gargle with salt water, or suck on throat lozenges, hard candy, or flavored frozen desserts (such as Popsicles)
- ☞ You may want to take acetaminophen (Datril, Panadol, Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Medipren, Motrin, Nuprin) to relieve pain and fever. Aspirin should be avoided because it has been associated with a disease called *Reye’s syndrome* in children. Reye’s syndrome is a serious illness that can lead to death.

Do I need an antibiotic?

Antibiotics like penicillin are of no help in mononucleosis, because mononucleosis is a virus and antibiotics are used to treat infections caused by bacteria. But your doctor may give you an antibiotic if you have a bacterial infection in addition to having mononucleosis.

What about sports and exercise?

Avoid sports activities or exercise of any kind until your doctor tells you it's safe. Moving around too much puts you at risk of rupturing your spleen. You need to avoid physical activities for about three to four weeks after the infection starts.

Information provided by the American Academy of Family Physicians (www.aafp.org) and (familydoctor.org)

This information provides a general overview of infectious mononucleosis and may not apply to everyone. Please make an appointment with [Student Health Services](#) if you think you may have mono.