



# Mononucleosis

If you get “mono” or infectious mononucleosis, you may think you have a bad cold or the flu. Mononucleosis is actually caused by viruses, just like a cold, but it can be more serious than other viral infections. It is usually caused by the Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV). But other organisms such as cytomegalovirus (CMV) may also trigger it. Teens and young adults are most likely to catch it.

Doctors diagnose mononucleosis with a blood test. Symptoms usually show up four to six weeks after you are exposed to the virus. They can include:

- fever
- a bad sore throat
- swollen lymph nodes in the neck and armpit
- tiredness, weakness, aches, and dizziness
- an enlarged spleen
- a rash (in some cases)

Mono may last for several weeks, usually with mild symptoms. But symptoms can come back and last for several months. Your lymph nodes may remain enlarged for up to a month after you begin to feel better. Younger children who get mono often don't have any symptoms, but they are still able to pass the virus to others.

Mono passes from person to person by saliva, mucus (from the nose and throat), and sometimes by tears. You can spread mono by kissing or having intimate contact, or by sharing a drinking glass, utensils, or food with an infected person. To help make sure that others don't get mono from you, avoid these activities if you have the virus. (Ordinary dishwashing with soap and hot water is enough to make eating utensils safe.)

Someone who has mono can be contagious for several weeks before showing any symptoms. A person will remain contagious until the symptoms go away. Once someone has been infected with the virus, he or she will be immune to the infection in the future.

It's really important for people with mono to get lots of rest. Depending on how you feel, and how bad your symptoms are, you can usually take care of yourself at home. You will need to get eight to ten hours of sleep each night and cut back on your usual activities. You may also need to rest during the day. People with mono often take time off from school or work so that they can get better. You'll also need to drink plenty of liquids and avoid getting dehydrated. Although there are no prescription drugs that work for mono, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) to help with aches and pains and high fevers. Antiviral drugs don't help.

If you think that you might have mono, you should see your doctor to get tested. Even though the best way to get better is through home care, you should call your doctor right away if:

- throat pain becomes so bad that it's difficult to swallow or breathe, or
- you get a sudden pain in your stomach or abdomen

Most people don't get complications from mono, but it is possible for some people to develop mild jaundice (yellowing of the skin). This only happens if the liver becomes inflamed temporarily. In rare cases, mono may lead to the rupture of an enlarged spleen, which is a more serious complication. If this happens, it can cause painful bleeding in the abdomen. This usually happens if someone engages in rough activity or contact sports when they are ill with mono. If you have mono, avoid these activities.

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## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org/mydoctor** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Visit our Web site just for young adults: **kp.org/youngadulthealth**
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to **ndvh.org**. Teens and young adults can call the Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or connect to **loveisrespect.org**.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.