

MONONUCLEOSIS

What You Should Know

Mononucleosis (mon-o-nu-klee-O-sis) is a viral infection that affects your lungs, liver, and lymphatic (lim-FA-tik) system or tissue fluids. The virus, known as Epstein-Barr, usually affects people between the ages of 12 and 40 years. It can take from 10 days to 6 months to recover from mononucleosis. You may continue to feel tired for 3 to 6 weeks after your condition improves.

Causes

The virus is spread mainly by saliva and you can get it by close contact, such as kissing. You are more likely to catch the virus if you are tired, under stress, or have another illness.

Signs & Symptoms

Symptoms include fever, sore throat, swollen glands, headaches, body aches, fatigue, loss of appetite, swollen liver, swollen spleen, abdominal pain, nausea, and occasionally yellow skin and eyes.

Care

There is no specific cure. Eating healthy foods and getting extra rest are important. Drink plenty of water or juice every day. While you still have this infection, remember to keep away from those who are most likely to catch it from you: infants and people who are already ill.

Risks

Without the proper care, you risk the loss of excessive amounts of body fluids and salts. You also may not get the vitamins and minerals your body needs. There is a rare chance that your spleen will rupture, or that the heart, lungs, or brain and nervous system may become affected. Deaths have occurred.

What You Should Do

- ◆ Anyone under 18 years of age should avoid taking aspirin or any medicines that contain aspirin. This could lead to brain and liver damage (Reye's syndrome). Be sure to read the label on any over-the-counter medicines you buy. For fever and pain, take acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®), or naproxen (Aleve®) instead.
- ◆ Gargling may help relieve your sore throat. Use warm salt water (1 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of water) or double-strength tea. Sucking on hard candy also helps.
- ◆ Rest until your temperature returns to normal (98.6° F or 37° C). Get plenty of sleep. You may gradually resume regular activity after your fever is gone, but be sure to rest when you are tired.
- ◆ Although you may not feel like eating while you are ill, try to eat a balanced diet. Drink at least 8 glasses of fluids each day, especially while you have a fever.
- ◆ Avoid physical activity such as heavy lifting, strenuous exercise, or contact sports for 4 to 5 weeks. Such activity may injure your spleen.
- ◆ Don't try to push yourself too hard. Most people recover in 2 to 4 weeks, but you may continue to feel tired for 3 to 6 weeks after the other symptoms are gone.
- ◆ Avoid drinking alcohol for at least one month to decrease the work of the liver.

Call Your Health Care Provider If...

- ◆ You develop a high temperature.
- ◆ Your fever isn't gone in a few days.
- ◆ You still have symptoms after several weeks.
- ◆ You have yellowing of the skin.

Seek Care Immediately If...

- ◆ You have severe pain in your abdomen or shoulder.
- ◆ You have trouble swallowing or breathing.
- ◆ You feel dizzy or confused.