

## INFECTIOUS MONONUCLEOSIS (Mono)

Infectious mononucleosis is a syndrome caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). It occurs commonly in college age populations and is a self-limiting disease. Contrary to popular belief, mono is not very contagious to the general population because the virus is primarily spread through saliva during close personal contact such as kissing, eating, drinking and sharing utensils, etc. About 15% of normal, healthy adults shed EBV. The majority of cases probably are contracted by intimate contact between susceptible people and normal, healthy people who are shedders of EBV.

### How do I know I have mono?

Symptoms of mono range from mild to severe. They include sore throat, fatigue and swollen glands (enlarged lymph-nodes in the neck and perhaps elsewhere). In addition you may have a fever, nasal congestion, a rash, enlarged spleen and inflamed liver. To establish the diagnosis, a physical examination is required. If signs and symptoms suggestive of mono are present, the practitioner will order appropriate laboratory tests to confirm the diagnosis. A blood test is required.

## SELF-CARE FOR MONONUCLEOSIS

### WHAT SHOULD I DO?

There are no medications that will kill the mono virus. Treatment is largely supportive and consists of making yourself as comfortable as possible. The majority of people recover without specific therapy.



### ■ For a sore throat:

- Gargle with warm salt water (1/2 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water) or a half-and-half mixture of hydrogen peroxide and water several times each day.
- Throat sprays such as Chloroseptic can temporarily relieve throat discomfort.
- Warm liquids like weak tea or warm water usually make a sore throat feel better.
- Take Tylenol (2 tablets) or Advil (400-600 mg) as directed.
- You may want to avoid foods that could irritate your sore throat such as citric fruits and juices as well as acidic foods (e.g., tomatoes and tomato sauce). You should continue to keep your fluid intake up.

### ■ For fatigue:

- The majority of people are able to attend classes and perform normal daily activities. You should try to increase your rest and limit activities, especially while you have a fever.

### ■ For a stuffed nose:

- Drink plenty of water. Fluids help to loosen nasal secretions.
- Take a steamy shower and use a vaporizer to help loosen and drain secretions.
- If nasal congestion continues to be a problem, over-the-counter decongestants (e.g. Sudafed) help to shrink swollen membranes and dry up secretions. These medications only help to relieve certain symptoms and are not cures.

### ■ For a fever:

- Increase your fluid intake to help reduce the fever.
- Get as much rest as possible – at least 8 hours.
- Take Tylenol (2 tablets as directed) to reduce fever and help soothe muscle aches.

### ■ For swollen glands:

- Swollen glands are present by the end of the first week, remain enlarged during the second week and subside over the next several weeks; there is no specific therapy for this symptom.

***Be sure to read dosage, directions and warnings on all medications.***

### How long will I be sick?

The fever and sore throat usually lasts 5 to 7 days. In most cases, other symptoms will disappear within 3 to 4 weeks. The rate of recovery is influenced by your psychological state. People who are strongly motivated to return to their usual activities recover more rapidly than others.

### What are the less common symptoms?

Less common symptoms of mono include a rash, swelling of the eyelids, headaches, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) and vague abdominal discomfort and tenderness over the liver and spleen area.

## WHAT SHOULDN'T I DO?

### ■ Do not drink alcohol:

There are usually minor changes in the liver during the acute stages of mono. It is advised not to drink alcohol for at least 3-4 weeks after the onset of the illness.

### ■ Do not participate in contact sports:

In 50% of cases, the spleen is enlarged, fragile and may rupture if a blow to the chest or abdomen is sustained. Activity may usually be resumed 3-4 weeks after the onset of the symptoms, but if you are involved in strenuous physical activity or athletics, it is best to consult your practitioner when you may resume activity.



### **Can I get mono more than once?**

Usually not. Although the EB virus remains in the body indefinitely, there is no proof that it recurs. Once an individual has had mono there is permanent immunity. Rarely, the virus may be reactivated if a person has been infected by other viruses or viruses similar to EBV and may present with the same symptoms.

### **Can I give it to my roommate?**

Mono is not a virus that is transmitted through the air; therefore it is not contagious to the general population. However, it is transmitted through saliva, becoming very contagious when kissing, sharing eating and drinking utensils, etc. Patients do not need to be isolated; college roommates and significant others are at only a slight risk of being infected.

### **How long will I be contagious?**

Persons with infectious mono may be able to spread the infection to others for a period of weeks. The virus is also found frequently in saliva of healthy people who spread the virus intermittently for life. Most adults are immune due to previous infection.



**Now that you are better informed about mono, you should relax and get plenty of rest. Call Health Services if we can be of further help.**

**Hope you feel better soon!**



# **HUSKIE HINTS**

## **Self-care For Mono**



**NIU Health Services  
Division of Student Affairs  
Wirtz Drive West  
DeKalb, Illinois 60115  
(815) 753-1311**