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## What's Mono?

Have you ever heard of the "kissing disease"? If you said that it's mono, you're absolutely correct.

But you don't get mono only from kissing. Infectious mononucleosis, called mono for short, is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), which is a type of herpes virus. Other viruses in the herpes family cause cold sores and illnesses like chickenpox.

### How Do Kids Get Mono?

Most people who get mono are between the ages of 15 and 25, but younger kids can get it, too. The mono virus affects the lymph nodes, throat, salivary glands, liver, spleen, and blood, and it can make a person feel tired and achy all over. It can also make you lose your appetite.

You probably know what your lymph nodes are, and you probably guessed that your salivary glands are inside of your mouth. But what about your spleen? It's located on the left side of your abdomen, just under the ribcage, and it helps cleanse your blood of bacteria and viruses.

Mono is contagious, which means someone who has it can spread the virus to other people. Even though it's called the kissing disease, there are other ways you can get mono. They all involve contact with saliva (spit) — so sharing straws, toothbrushes, or food from the same plate can spread mono.

At first, people usually don't feel sick after getting infected with the EBV virus. A person could be infected — and be spreading mono — and not even know it. That's why it's important not to share things like forks, straws, water bottles, or lip gloss at school.

### What Are the Signs of Mono?

Mono can cause you to feel really, really tired, but you may have other symptoms, too. These include:

- fever
- sore throat
- swollen lymph nodes (the infection-fighting glands in your neck, underarms, groin, and elsewhere throughout your body)
- headaches
- sore muscles
- enlarged liver or spleen

Sometimes, it may seem like you have the flu or maybe strep throat because the symptoms are so much alike. The only way to tell for sure if you have mono is to go to a doctor, who will examine you and draw blood for tests (one test is called the Monospot) to see if you have mono.

### What If I Have Mono?

If you have mono, you probably will need plenty of rest. This might mean no school for a while, no sports, and no running outside playing with friends or even wrestling with your little brother.

While you're resting, drink plenty of water and other fluids. You can ask your mom or dad to give you a pain reliever if you have a fever or if your muscles are sore. Don't take any aspirin, though, because that can put you at risk for a condition called Reye syndrome, which can be dangerous.

Some kids with mono might not feel very sick at all, so a lot of bed rest isn't necessarily for everyone. But it's very important to listen to your body. A kid who has mono should tell a parent if he or she starts feeling worse. And if the kid feels tired and run down, it's the body's way of saying more rest is needed.

If you play contact sports (like football or basketball) and get mono, you will probably need to avoid them while you're sick and for about a month after the illness — especially if your spleen is enlarged. Your doctor will let you know when it's safe for you to get back in the game.

Mono usually goes away after a few weeks, even though you'll have to take it easy for awhile. Make sure you wash your hands after you cough or sneeze. Keep your straws, forks, and toothbrushes to yourself, and... no kissing for a few months!

Reviewed by: Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph, MD  
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