

Patient Information:**Mononucleosis**

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What is Mono?

Mononucleosis is a viral illness usually caused by the Epstein-Barr virus, or EBV. Other infections that can cause an illness similar to typical EBV Mono include cytomegalovirus (CMV,) Toxoplasma, HIV, viral hepatitis, and drug hypersensitivity reactions.

SYMPTOMS OF MONO

Fatigue, malaise (feeling poorly,) and muscle aches often are early symptoms. Fever, sore throat, and swollen lymph nodes are common in the first 2 weeks but can persist for a month. Headaches can be severe and are fairly common. Abdominal pain, nausea, or vomiting can occur. Rash, usually on the arms or trunk, occur in ~5% of those infected. Any combination of the above symptoms can occur in Mono. *Most people (>90%) who have Mono and take ampicillin or amoxicillin at the same time develop a rash...this is NOT a drug allergy.* It is possible for malaise and concentration difficulties to persist for months, even after the illness has otherwise resolved.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- ◆ Infection with EBV is common in the world, usually in early childhood. A 2nd peak occurs in late adolescence. Over 90% of adults have antibodies to EBV, indicative of a past infection.
- ◆ The incubation period, or time from exposure to illness, is ~4-6 weeks in young adults. Most people will only get Mono once, but it can recur.
- ◆ Liver function tests are abnormal in >90% of those infected. Blood tests for the liver are not required but are usually done in those with evidence of abdominal pain, nausea/vomiting or liver damage.
- ◆ Deaths are very rare but tend to occur in those with central nervous system (CNS) complications, splenic rupture, airway obstruction (such as from tonsils that completely block the back of the throat,) or a secondary bacterial infection. *To prevent complications it is very important to rest, get plenty of sleep, not to do any strenuous exercise, and to avoid drinking alcohol.*

TESTING

- ◆ The heterophile or Monospot test is positive in ~40% of those with Mono in the first week of their illness. By the third week of illness, 80-90% of those infected have a positive Monospot test. This

blood test is available at SHC. The Monospot test remains positive for ~3 months, even after the illness has resolved, but sometimes it can remain positive for a year.

- ◆ Changes in white blood cells (number or type of cell,) red blood cells (anemia,) or platelets can occur. These can be tested at SHC and are included in a complete blood count, or cbc. A cbc is not a required test but can be helpful in some cases.
- ◆ EBV titres can be done in cases where the Monospot is negative but it appears the patient has symptoms of Mono. These titres are not free - they carry a charge to the patient.

TREATMENTS

- ◆ There are no medicines that cure Mono. Antibiotics are used for bacterial infections and do not work on viruses. Sometimes people are infected with both Mono and another infection, such as Strep throat or influenza. Drinking fluids, sleeping >8 hours/day, avoiding physical activity, and good nutrition can help the body's immune system deal with the Mono virus. Poor stress management can significantly worsen your immune system and thus impair the healing process or make you susceptible to complications.
- ◆ Warm liquids, such as hot teas or soups, can be helpful to a sore throat. Chicken soup is supportive of a healthy immune system. Warm salt water gargles can improve the pain and swelling in the throat. Jello, applesauce, oatmeal, smoothies, and popsicles are foods that contain water and may be easy to swallow.

PRECAUTIONS

- ◆ Mono can affect the stability and function of the liver and spleen; therefore, avoid alcohol and strenuous physical activity for 4-6⁺ weeks.
- ◆ A person infected with EBV/Mono is most contagious for the first 1-2 days prior to the onset of illness and for the first 1-2 weeks of the illness. However, it is possible to spread the virus in some cases for many weeks. *Kissing and sharing food/drinks are common ways to "catch" this infection from others.* Often it is not known exactly how you were exposed to the virus.
- ◆ Return to SHC if you can't manage your illness well or if you seem to be getting worse.