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. Mono is primarily spread through saliva during close personal contact such as kissing, sharing of eating or dining utensils, etc. About 15% of normal, healthy adults shed EBV from a previous infection. The majority of cases are probably 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 which can be falsely negative during early illness.

SELF-CARE FOR MONONUCLEOSIS

WHAT SHOULD I DO?
There are no medications that will kill the mono virus. Antibiotics are not helpful. Treatment is largely supportive and consists of making yourself as comfortable as possible. The majority of people recover without specific therapy. Medications only help to relieve certain symptoms and are not cures.

For a sore throat:
✔ Gargle with warm salt water (1/2 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water).
✔ Throat sprays or lozenges can temporarily relieve throat discomfort.
✔ Warm liquids like weak tea with honey or warm water usually makes a sore throat feel better.
✔ Take acetaminophen (i.e. Tylenol) or ibuprofen (i.e. Advil) 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 to prevent dehydration.

For fatigue:
✔ Although fatigue can last for months, 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 such as phenylephrine (generic Sudafed PE) help to shrink swollen membranes and dry up secretions.

For a fever:
✔ Increase your fluid intake to help reduce the fever and prevent dehydration.
✔ Get as much rest as possible – sleep at least 8 hours.
✔ Take or ibuprofen (i.e. Advil) as directed to reduce fever and help soothe muscle aches. Avoid acetaminophen (i.e. Tylenol) due to possible liver irritation due to EBV.

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 usually 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), tenderness over the liver and spleen or vague abdominal discomfort.

WHAT SHOULDN’T I DO?

Do not take aspirin – it has been associated with a disease called Reyes Syndrome which is a severe illness that can cause death.

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 may become intermittently enlarged and fragile. It may rupture more easily if a blow to the chest or abdomen is sustained during this time. Normal activity may usually be resumed 4-6 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 about 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 very contagious unless there is close personal contact. It is usually 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 low risk of being infected. Good hand washing is very important in limiting spread of the infection to others.

How long will I be contagious?
Persons with infectious mono are most contagious during the first 1-2 weeks of infection, especially while they have fever; however even after full recovery people can continue to spread the virus intermittently for life.

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!