**Mononucleosis**

"Mono" or infectious mononucleosis is characterized by fever, severe sore throat, and significant lymph node swelling. It is caused by the Epstein Barr virus (EBV).

Mono is not highly contagious through routine contact, and is rarely passed from one family member to another. However, because EBV is present in saliva, the disease can be spread by intimate oral contact, hence the term, the "kissing disease."

Mono is an illness that gets better without any particular medical treatment; basically your body's immune system usually fights off the infection without serious complications. However, despite the brevity of the acute stage, fatigue and lethargy can last for 2 to 3 months. Antibodies will develop which probably protect you from re-infection.

**Signs and Symptoms**

The average incubation period ranges from 30 to 45 days.

Early signs and symptoms are:
- sore throat
- intermittent fever as high as 103°
- headache
- muscle aches and pains
- usually marked swellings of lymph glands in the front and back of the neck and, perhaps, the armpit and groin.

The liver and spleen are also involved. Infection in these organs often causes no symptoms but may cause nausea, decreased appetite, and abdominal pain.

If your need is urgent, and the student health service is closed, go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call 911 for an ambulance.

Symptoms usually persist for 7 to 10 days. Although most people with mono require more sleep, they do not need to stay in bed continuously. The length of recovery varies among individuals depending on the severity of the disease. Most patients feel normal three weeks after the onset of symptoms. In some, complaints such as fatigue and lack of energy last for weeks or months. Emotional or academic problems may affect recovery time.

**Diagnosis**

Since the symptoms may not be very specific, accurate diagnosis usually requires a blood test. Positive test results may not occur until a week or more into the illness. There is a specific blood test for EBV antibodies called the Mono Spot. In addition to the blood count and mono test, your provider may order liver function tests.

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms, on the results of your physical exam, and often on the results of laboratory tests. Once mono is diagnosed, there is no need for follow-up tests in the majority of cases because the mono test will remain positive for at least six weeks, and in some cases three to six months. Subsequent testing within this time period is usually unnecessary and costly. The positive test results are due to antibodies developed in response to the EBV infection and may not correlate with the actual present state of health.

**Treatment and Self-Care Tips:**

Rest. Do not jog, play sports, or exercise. Do not tire yourself unnecessarily. Resting, however, does not mean you should stop all normal daily routines...but be sensible!

Avoid pressure to the abdomen. Do not lift heavy objects, play contact sports, or engage in vigorous
physical activity. Anytime you develop a tender abdomen, seek immediate medical attention. The spleen and/or liver are affected by the virus, and though rare, the spleen can rupture. If your need is urgent, call 911 for an ambulance.

Do not drink alcohol, especially if your liver is enlarged or you have jaundice (yellow skin or eyes). Avoid alcohol for three to six weeks because of its affect on the liver.

Take ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) every 6-8 hours for fever and discomfort unless a health care provider advises against these medications.

Increase your daily fluid intake, and eat at least two "good" meals a day.

Practice good hygiene and refrain from kissing for three to six weeks.

How is Mono Treated?
Most people recover completely without any medication. Infrequently, in severe cases, a cortisone derivative may be prescribed to reduce the local swelling of the throat, lymph nodes, liver and spleen. Your clinician may order a throat culture to detect the presence of streptococcal bacteria (strep), since strep throat may co-exist with mono.

An antibiotic may be prescribed to treat the secondary bacterial infection. The antibiotic is not a cure for mono; viruses do not respond to antibiotics.