



For Members

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Teens and the "Kissing Disease"

Knocked out by mononucleosis? Speed up the healing with homeopathic treatment!

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Being a teenager can be pretty stressful. (Though, frankly, being a parent of a teen is probably worse!) Besides the pressures of keeping up with homework, school sports, and peer relationships, many teens are dealing with fluctuating hormones, mood swings, poor eating habits, and late night bedtimes. All these things can have a negative impact on immune systems, making teens especially vulnerable to a viral illness called infectious mononucleosis—or “mono,” for short. Known as “the kissing disease” because it usually spreads via saliva, mono can debilitate a teen for a few weeks—or a few months.



Teens have it worse

Mono is caused by one of the most common human viruses—the Epstein-Barr virus, a member of the herpesvirus family. Most people get exposed to this virus sometime during their lives. When children become infected, they usually show no symptoms or only mild, brief illnesses. When teens or young adults get infected, however, it causes mononucleosis almost 50% of the time.

The primary symptoms of mono are fever, fatigue, sore throat, and swollen lymph nodes. The throat pain is often quite severe and may be confused with strep throat. On physical examination, the doctor may find an enlarged liver and/or spleen. Heart and central nervous system involvement are rare.

Blood tests will usually reveal a normal to moderately elevated white cell count, an increased number of lymphocytes (a type of white blood cell that helps the body fight infection) with more than 10% of them being atypical, and positive “mono spot” results.

This mono spot test, which checks for

certain antibodies to the Epstein-Barr virus and confirms mono, will be positive about 2 to 9 weeks after a person gets infected.

A virus that's hard to escape

After infection, the Epstein-Barr virus remains dormant in a few cells in the throat or blood for the rest of the person's life. It can be reactivated at different times without symptoms of illness and is frequently found in the saliva of healthy people. For this reason, transmission of the virus is almost impossible to prevent. It's estimated that 95% of adults in their 30s and 40s have antibodies to the virus.

In my experience, the correct homeopathic remedy will resolve mono within 24 to 48 hours.

The time from exposure to appearance of symptoms (incubation period) is about 4 to 6 weeks. Symptoms typically last anywhere from 2 weeks to 2 months, but occasionally a teen will continue to suffer with fatigue for a few months longer. Interestingly, some adults will say that they have never been completely well since getting mono as teens. (Treating teens homeopathically for mono can help prevent such later problems.)

There is no conventional treatment for mono beyond rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and taking medicines that might bring symptom relief (e.g., ibuprofen). Oral steroids may be used in very rare cases to decrease severe swelling of the throat and tonsils.

Speedy recovery with homeopathy

Because there is no conventional treatment for mono, I have had the opportunity to treat numerous cases through the years and am happy to report great success. In my experience, the correct homeopathic remedy will resolve mono within 24 to 48 hours. These teens are back in school within a few days with their painful symptoms gone, no lingering fatigue, and no relapses. In the past few months alone, I have treated four consecutive teenagers with mono; each was a referral from the previous teen, who returned to school in excellent health. This is often how a teen with mono lands in my office; word gets around at school, or one parent of a satisfied patient tells another parent.

These teens come to me with some combination of typical mono symptoms such as fatigue, sore throat, night sweats, and enlarged lymph nodes. While I pay attention to these symptoms and want to find a homeopathic remedy that will address them, such common symptoms of mono are rarely the deciding factor in helping me choose an appropriate remedy. Rather, it is the *individualizing* symptoms—those that are unique or unusual for mono, or those that are unique or unusual to the patient—that are most significant in finding the correct remedy. Homeopathy is more patient-specific than disease-specific, and that's why each case of mono is treated differently. The following case is an example.

Girl with a drinking problem

Two years ago, a mother brought her 16-year-old daughter to me for behavior problems. Cindy had been drinking too much at parties to the point where she had “blacked out” on a number of occasions. The mother was concerned about her daughter’s self-destructive behavior and she hoped homeopathy could help. I worked with Cindy for six months and tried a number of remedies, but her reservedness made it difficult for me to connect



Kissing is not the only way mono can spread. Other saliva-to-saliva contact like sharing drinking glasses or utensils can transmit the Epstein-Barr virus.

with her in any meaningful way; I was unable to elicit symptoms that would lead me to a helpful remedy.



The throat pain is often quite severe and may be confused with strep throat.

Then one day, I received a call from her mother telling me that Cindy had just been diagnosed with mono. Cindy had been bedridden for three days now and was in a great deal of pain from a severe sore throat. She could not eat or drink, and her mother was growing increasingly concerned.

I asked the mother about any unusual or significant symptoms. "Well," she exclaimed, "there is such a foul odor coming from Cindy's mouth that I can smell it halfway down the hallway!" Now here is an uncommon or unique symptom; although many patients with mono may have some mouth odor because of infection in the throat, it is rare that a parent will mention this with such intensity. This unusually strong symptom made me think of *Mercurius vivus*, which happens to be a homeopathic remedy that is often useful for throat infections, especially when accompanied by offensive breath. However, what was most exciting to me was the realization that *Mercurius* also fit Cindy's constitutional state—that is, her overall mental, emotional, and physical profile.

People who need *Mercurius* constitutionally can be introverted, secretive, and sometimes self-destructive, and Cindy's reservedness and drinking fit these indications. Cindy was also sensitive to extremes of temperature (she hated summer and winter), which is sometimes seen in people needing *Mercurius*. While Cindy did not have some other common *Mercurius* indicators (like metallic taste in the mouth, feeling generally worse at night, offensive discharges, a tendency toward chronic ear/nose/throat infections or ulcerative colitis), I believed she had enough symptoms pointing to this remedy.

Both acute & constitutional

When a remedy for an acute illness (like mono, the flu, or any relatively short-term, self-limiting illness) also turns out to be the remedy that addresses the patient's overall constitutional/chronic condition, chances are excellent that the remedy will have a deeply curative effect. I had *Mercurius* 30c sent overnight to the mother and instructed her to give it to her daughter 3 times a day for a few days. Three days later, Cindy's mom called to report that within four hours of taking the first dose of *Mercurius*, her daughter had spiked a fever and felt worse. (A worsening of symptoms after taking a remedy is called a homeopathic "aggravation"; typically, it is short-lived and indicates that the remedy was on target and that improvement will soon follow.) By the following morning, Cindy's throat pain was much better. She felt famished, ate a hearty breakfast for the first time since she'd been sick, and had dramatically improved energy. Just one day later, Cindy was back in school.

Even more significant than this dramatic recovery from mono, however, was that over the next few months Cindy's behavior began to improve. She became happier and more communicative with her mother, and she stopped drinking excessively at parties. It has been two years now since Cindy had mono, and her health and behavior continue to be very good. She has needed no further doses of the remedy. Cindy's mother is thrilled with Cindy's improved behavior and happy to "have her daughter back." So *Mercurius* indeed helped Cindy on a constitutional level.

***Lycopodium* leads the way**

While many people with an acute illness (e.g., the flu) will need an acute remedy (a remedy that targets the acute illness alone), I have found that the majority of teens with mono have benefited from their constitutional remedy (a remedy targeting their overall mental, emotional, and physical condition). In my practice, one constitutional remedy seems to be indicated more often than others for helping teens with mononucleosis—*Lycopodium*. In fact, I have found it to be so common for teens with mono that unless I see strong symptoms to point me to another remedy

(as in Cindy's case above), I almost always consider *Lycopodium* as one of the top remedy choices.

Severe sore throat pain with swollen lymph glands, night sweats, and liver or spleen involvement are certainly part of the *Lycopodium* symptom profile, but these common mono symptoms are not sufficient to prescribe this remedy for a patient. It is a combination of the physical and the mental/emotional state of the patient that typically leads me to prescribe *Lycopodium*. For example, most of these teens are "good" kids who do well in school, follow the rules, and get along with their parents. Sometimes they have an inner insecurity and fear of authority; they may be following the rules because they are afraid not to. They tend not to have the lazy detachment, arrogance, or self-assuredness of a teen who might benefit from the remedy *Sulphur*, or the intense emotions, impulsivity, and passion of one needing *Medorrhinum*, or the irritability and neediness of a teen who might be helped by *Pulsatilla*.



She could not believe when she woke up that morning that her throat no longer hurt. "It was a miracle!" she exclaimed.

Sometimes I have seen a dullness or flatness to the personality of teens who've benefited from *Lycopodium*. The boys can be somewhat shy, sometimes "wimpy"-looking and cautious about playing sports (not in all cases though). Others can be fearful of new situations and meeting new people. Occasionally, kids needing this remedy can be very nasty at home with their parents, though very good outside of the home due to their fear of authority, and very bossy or mean to their younger siblings. Most that I've treated for mono, however, have been relatively well balanced with good peer relationships, good grades, and on the path to a college education.

In *The Homeopathic Treatment of Children*, an excellent book describing eight constitutional remedies for children, Paul Herscu, ND, says: "*Lycopodium* should be one of the first remedies considered for the treatment of mononucleosis." I have certainly found this to be true in my practice as well. Perhaps it is the *Lycopodium* weakness in the throat and liver/spleen that predisposes these kids, who already need *Lycopodium* constitutionally, toward getting mononucleosis acutely. Although *Lycopodium* is known to be a right-sided remedy (i.e., symptoms occur more often on the right side of the body), I have not noticed a predominance of right-sided throat pain or enlarged right tonsil in my *Lycopodium* mono cases, as one might expect, nor have I necessarily noticed an improvement from drinking warm drinks (another classic *Lycopodium* symptom).

Overnight recovery

Last fall, 16-year-old Mark came to me for help with mononucleosis. When I met him in the waiting room he initially averted my gaze, which seemed to portray a slight timidity. But once in my office, he quickly warmed up and answered all questions easily. He appeared younger than his age, and during the interview as he sat next to his mother, he sometimes looked to her for approval (unlike the friction I'll often see between teens and their parents).



The virus is frequently found in the saliva of healthy people. For this reason, transmission is almost

Mark complained of a severe sore throat, swollen neck glands, and fatigue. He had dark circles under his eyes and looked weak and tired. Nothing ameliorated the pain in his throat, and he spent most of the day sleeping. His mother told me that he did well in school, was liked by peers, and played on the school baseball team. Mark mentioned no significant fears or anxieties, and I could find nothing unusual or significant about his physical mono symptoms. He was basically a nice boy who did well in school and wanted to get into a good college. The only interesting clue to *Lycopodium* was that Mark would often get angry at his younger brother's friends if they did not treat Mark with respect. This helped to confirm for me

impossible to prevent.

some of that inner insecurity that I sometimes see in patients needing *Lycopodium*. I gave him one dose of *Lycopodium* 30c.*

Mark's mother called the next day to report that he had been up half the night because his fever had spiked and his throat pain was worse. Once again, this classic homeopathic aggravation was short-lived. He slept late and when he awakened at noon, his throat pain was greatly diminished and he felt better overall. From then on, he made a rapid recovery.

Mark was so surprised and impressed with his "overnight" improvement that he did a term paper for school on homeopathic medicine. He also referred his friend Nancy to me, when she came down with mono some months later (see case below). Over the past year, Mark has received additional doses of *Lycopodium*, which have greatly alleviated his allergies and mild asthma.

Striving to be good

Eighteen-year-old Nancy, a high school senior with a pleasant demeanor, had been complaining of a sore throat for over a month when her mother brought her to see me. One week earlier, their pediatrician had diagnosed mono and detected an enlarged liver and spleen.

This young woman had severe throat pain that felt better when she drank ice cold water and when she ate hot soup. She'd been feverish the last few days and complained of extreme fatigue. On examination, I noticed dark discoloration under her eyes, very inflamed tonsils, and moderate right upper abdominal tenderness from the liver enlargement. Nancy had a history of strep throats, acid reflux, and mild allergies in spring. She was not presently on any medications.

Nancy was a very responsible, well-liked young woman who got along well with her parents, teachers, and peers. She described herself as "driven." She strived for excellent grades, had already been accepted to a number of top-notch colleges, and she was looking forward to graduating. Her mom described her as a "good" girl, not at all rebellious or contrary, with an even temperament.

Except for the liver and spleen enlargement (which is not uncommon with mono), there was nothing that really stood out about this case. My overall impression was that Nancy would benefit from *Lycopodium*. A quick check of the following symptoms in the repertory (homeopathic reference) confirmed it for me: Throat, inflammation, tonsils; Throat, enlargement, tonsils; External throat, swelling, lymphatic tissue, cervical; External throat, pain, lymphatic tissue; Abdomen, liver, enlarged; Abdomen, pain, hypochondria, right; Mind, responsibility, strong; Mind, ambitious; and Stomach, heartburn. So I gave Nancy one dose of *Lycopodium* 30c.*

A week passed before I realized that I hadn't heard from Nancy, so I called her on her cell phone. She apologized for not getting in touch with me but said that the day after taking *Lycopodium* she felt completely better! She could not believe when she woke up that morning that her throat no longer hurt. "It was a miracle!" she exclaimed. Nancy made a rapid recovery and was back to her usual activities at school within a few days.

When I saw her two weeks later, she no longer had any abdominal pain or tenderness, and the dark circles under her eyes were gone. Because *Lycopodium* had worked so well for Nancy and I believed it to be her constitutional remedy that could help her with possible future complaints, I sent her home with a higher strength dose (*Lycopodium* 200c) and asked her to hold onto it just in case she needed it when she was away at college.

Not every teen needs Lycopodium!

It is important to emphasize that although *Lycopodium* is one of the remedies I've used most frequently in treating teens with mononucleosis, any homeopathic remedy can be used successfully—if it matches the individual's mental, emotional, and physical state. To find the curative remedy, I always look for those symptoms that stand out or are unusual, since each person manifests dis-ease in his or her own unique way. As an example, here is another fascinating case of a teen with mono that I saw several years ago.

Ghost story

Michelle, age 15, was brought to me by her mom after being diagnosed with mononucleosis. She had the usual, physical symptoms (sore throat, fatigue, enlarged lymph nodes), but when I asked if she had any fears, I'll never forget her response. She seemed to turn pale, as if she had "seen a ghost." She looked at her mother without answering me, as if it would be too terrifying to even

mention her fear.

The mother revealed that ever since Michelle had seen the movie *Scream* six months earlier—a movie that shows very graphic scenes of young adults being violently stabbed—she had developed an intense fear of the dark and of robbers. She had also become more withdrawn, cautious, and fearful in general.

I gave Michelle *Stramonium*, a very common remedy for children with either violent behavior or a fear of violence. It's the first remedy I think of when I see this "scared stiff" expression.

The mom called me a few days later to say: on the night of the day her daughter took *Stramonium*, the girl awakened terrified from a nightmare that she could not describe in detail. The following morning, she slept later than usual and awakened feeling much better, with less throat pain and a return of her energy and appetite. She was back in school the following day.

When Michelle came back to me for a follow-up visit 4 weeks later, her mother was happy to report that her daughter was "back to her old self." Michelle was no longer afraid of the dark or of robbers, and she was even able to talk comfortably about the movie. She seemed much happier and free of the fear that was so evident in our first meeting. The change in Michelle was truly remarkable—but not uncommon in my practice with such a deep-acting remedy as *Stramonium*.

The most striking symptoms

Although *Stramonium* is not a commonly used remedy for tonsillitis or mono, it is in the repertory rubrics, "Throat, pain" and "External throat, pain, lymphatic tissue cervical." However, even if *Stramonium* were not in those rubrics, I would have given it to Michelle anyway. When you see such a striking mental, emotional, or physical symptom as the strong fear that was evident in Michelle, it often takes precedence over more common, less striking symptoms in choosing a remedy. As Hahnemann states in *The Organon*, sixth edition, aphorism 153: "... the more striking, strange, unusual, peculiar (characteristic) signs and symptoms in the case are especially, *almost exclusively*, the ones to which close attention should be given, because it is these *above all* which must correspond to very similar symptoms in the medicine being sought."

Hahnemann also states in aphorism 210: "... even in so-called physical diseases, the mental and emotional state is *always affected*." And he continues in aphorism 211: "... this is so important that the psychic condition of the patient is often the decisive factor in choosing a homeopathic remedy, because it is a particularly characteristic symptom and one that can least of all remain hidden from the carefully observant physician."

Homeopathy gets to the root cause

Perhaps *Stramonium* helped this young woman because by freeing her of her deepest fears, a major stress on her system was alleviated, thus helping her own immune system restore a healthy balance. In my 15 years of clinical practice, I have observed that the majority of physical diseases are triggered by mental/emotional stress such as stress on the job, difficult interpersonal relationships, grief, loss, an abusive past, or negative thinking. Over months and years, it is as if negative thoughts and feelings arising from various stressors become internalized in the body, leading to physical disease. Acknowledgement of this mind-body connection is becoming more common within conventional circles as well. The beauty of homeopathy, however, is that because it treats the whole person—mental, emotional, and physical—it can help to alleviate the root causes of illness.

It is especially rewarding to be able to help children and teens before negative patterns of behavior or illness become entrenched. Whether it is treating mono or any other illness, the opportunity to help a youngster be free of dis-ease so that they can live life to their greatest creative potential is truly a gratifying experience.

* In each of these instances, I used a remedy from Hahnemann Laboratories in the 30c potency. In my experience, remedies prepared by this pharmacy act more strongly than certain homeopathic remedies at health food stores, which is why repetition of the dose is often not necessary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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She lives with her husband, Daniel, and has two children, Jason (20), Sara (16), a dog (Pulsatilla), a cat (Sulphur), and a very loud cockatiel (Nux vomica). She is working on a book of cured homeopathic cases. She can be reached at 914-472-0666.

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