

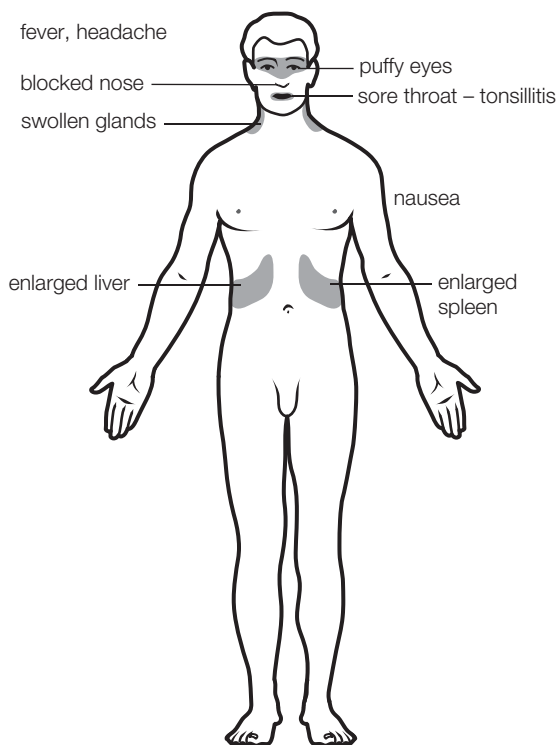
Glandular fever

What is glandular fever?

Glandular fever (properly known as *Epstein–Barr mononucleosis*) is a viral infection that causes an illness similar to influenza. It is sometimes called ‘the kissing disease’ because it was observed to be passed from one person to another through the mouth. It is also transmitted by coughing and sharing food. The virus spreads through the bloodstream and the lymphatic system, causing the spleen, liver and lymph glands to swell as well as causing a fever (hence the term ‘glandular fever’).

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms are similar to those of the flu: fever, headache, blocked nose, nausea, mouth breathing, sore throat (you may have tonsillitis) and a general sense of feeling ‘out of sorts’. The patient may be aware of having swollen, tender glands (lymph nodes) in the neck, armpits and groin. Less common symptoms include a rash and jaundice.



Symptoms and signs of glandular fever

How is it diagnosed?

The best way to diagnose the illness is for a blood test to be done. The blood smear also shows abnormal cells (called *monocytes*) under the microscope, hence the name *mononucleosis*.

How long does it last?

The major symptoms usually disappear within 2 or 3 weeks, but for a further period of at least 2 weeks you may feel weak, lacking in energy and depressed. Occasionally the lethargy can last for many months, suggesting that chronic glandular fever is one of the causes of chronic fatigue syndrome.

How common is the problem?

It is probably more common than realised, because many cases are mild and pass unnoticed or are simply mistaken for a mild attack of influenza. This applies particularly to children. Children and young adults are the most likely to catch the virus, but the disease is usually seen in 15 to 25 year olds. Most people are probably affected by glandular fever at some stage in their life.

What are the risks?

It is not a dangerous disease, but can make you feel extremely sick if it causes hepatitis. It can lead to chronic fatigue for several months. You may have a relapse during the course of the first year after contracting it. However, it eventually settles completely and the body returns to normal.

What is the treatment?

Because glandular fever is a viral infection, antibiotics will not help. The illness must simply run its course.

Do:

- take paracetamol (in modest doses) to relieve discomfort or pain, but not if the liver is affected
- rest (the best treatment), preferably at home and indoors
- drink plenty of fluids such as water and fruit juices
- gargle soluble aspirin or 30% glucose to soothe the throat
- disinfect articles soiled with nose and throat discharges, such as handkerchiefs.

Don't:

- drink alcohol or eat fatty foods
- push yourself to perform tasks
- attempt to return to your normal daily routine until advised to do so by your doctor (about 4 weeks after the illness starts)
- participate in contact sports until at least 4 weeks after complete recovery
- share drinking containers.

Finally, it is common to feel depressed during the illness and in the recovery phase because you may feel tired and lethargic. Report any such problems to your doctor.