

Find out about health issues @ thepress.co.uk

FAMILY MATTERS

## BEATING 'KISSING DISEASE'

A RAGING sore throat and headache, soaring temperature, and horrible tiredness you just can't shake - if it's not the self-inflicted 'symptoms' of a stinking hangover, it may well be that you've caught glandular fever.

The dreaded illness mostly affects teenagers and young adults, although you can still catch it later in life, if your body hasn't built up a hardy immunity against it.



This highly-infectious virus can leave you utterly exhausted and bedridden - and as is the cruel nature of life, it's particularly rife during the festive period, when people begin locking lips under the mistletoe, as it's passed from person to person through saliva (hence why it's often referred to as the 'kissing disease').

Here, GP and Healthspan medical director, Dr Sarah Brewer, explains more about glandular fever and how to avoid it this Christmas - and what to do if you are unlucky enough to catch it.

### What actually causes Glandular fever?

Also known as infectious mononucleosis, or 'mono', glandular fever is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). Once a person catches it, it's generally thought that the virus remains in their system for life, though it usually does not cause further illness.

However, it can leave people very poorly for months - and it's also linked with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME), which may sometimes, it's believed, be triggered by the virus. The main reason you feel terrible when you catch glandular fever is because your immune system goes into overdrive to fight off the virus. "Many of the worst symptoms associated with the fever are due to the body overreacting to the infection and attempting to flush it out as fast as possible," notes Dr Brewer.

### So you get it from kissing?

Yes, you can get it from locking lips, but that's not the only way it's spread. "UEBV is passed on in saliva, so it can also travel by coughing, spluttering, sneezing and by sharing toothbrushes," says Dr Brewer. "Someone who has recently had glandular fever can remain infectious for several months, but only half the people who catch the virus develop symptoms."

### What are the symptoms?

Anyone who has suffered with this nasty virus will tell you that it isn't pleasant. Glandular fever mainly produces flu-like symptoms and can be quite severe, with aching, fatigue, a high temperature, severe sore throat that isn't getting better as quickly as you'd normally expect, and swollen glands, especially in the neck. Thankfully, for most people, the worst symptoms usually resolve within three weeks, although sometimes complications can occur.

"The spleen and liver can also become enlarged and tender," says Dr Brewer. If you develop difficulty breathing or swallowing fluids, or severe abdominal pain, she advises that you go to A&E or phone for an ambulance.

### How is glandular fever treated?

Like many illnesses, there is no cure for glandular fever, so you'll have to wait out your painful throat with the old-fashioned combination of bed rest, fluids and painkillers. "A short course of steroids are sometimes prescribed if tonsils are very swollen and affect breathing," says Dr Brewer, although these will be prescribed by your doctor after an assessment of the symptoms.

If you're someone that's always on-the-go, make sure you take things down a notch. "It's important to take things easy for several months after glandular fever, to allow the immune system time to recover," says Dr Brewer.

# PHONE OBSESSION IS NOT REALLY SO SMART

## HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin

Figures show that more people now own a phone than those who don't, a massive transformation from 20 or so years ago, when only the truly wealthy or important owned such a device. We are now more connected than ever, and a smartphone has a multitude of uses other than verbal communication, including holding your diary, allowing surfing of the internet as well as playing games on. However, with smartphone addiction now a recognised illness, and some individuals checking their mobile device a whopping 150 times a day; has the desire to be permanently updated gone too far?

Smartphones have to some extent replaced face-to-face interaction. It has become the norm to place your smart phone by your cutlery when eating a meal, even if this is in a public setting with company.

People now feel comfortable to check their phones in a variety of situations that others might frown upon, which surprisingly include during a funeral service and even immediately after sex. Polls demonstrate that a certain group would rather be denied clean water for a shower rather than access to the internet. And although these might sound like amusing eccentricities, is this technology actually causing mental health issues?

Recent research led by Dr. Hyung Suk Seo, at the Korea University, Seoul, suggests this may be the case.

His team reviewed 19 teenagers with diagnosed smartphone addiction and compared them with the same number of youths without the problem. Using brain



**STATUS UPDATE:** Some people check their phones about 150 times a day and for many they have replaced real face-to-face interaction

scanning techniques also employed in the investigation of conditions including Alzheimer's disease, they found an imbalance in two chemicals, gaba amino butyric acid (GABA) and glutamate-glutamine (Glx). This imbalance has been linked with mood disorders including depression and anxiety, and it is notable that those study participants with diagnosed smartphone addiction had significantly higher scores on tools used to evaluate these mental health conditions. Thankfully, the research also demonstrated that after sessions of cognitive behavioural therapy,

this chemical imbalance was corrected, and hence this addiction can be treated.

So what can we do to address this? Although most adults older than 35 can remember a time before everyone had a mobile telephone, most under the age of 20 sadly cannot.

Children are great observers of parental behaviour, and if you are constantly on your smartphone, it is likely that your child will pick up the same bad habit.

While mobile technology undoubtedly has a very important place in today's society, it cannot and must not replace

face to face human interaction. Early emotional development and the understanding of behavioural norms rely on that smile, touch and words of encouragement, something that a mobile phone cannot deliver.

Current advice is that you should try if at all possible to limit both your child's as well as your own time spent on such internet devices.

Try to not have them at the dinner table where this may hinder actual conversation, and avoid checking your phone last thing before bed, which can interfere with your ability to wind down.

## Could palpitations be sign of heart issue?

**Q. I get what I think are palpitations. My heartbeat seems to race away and it's worse when I'm nervous. But I'm also worried it may be my heart - Jacqueline 39**

**A. Palpitations are a common complaint and thankfully not usually a sign of underlying heart disease, unlike chest pains or blackouts, where you should always seek rapid medical advice. As you mention, these symptoms can be made worse in situations of heightened emotions. Nevertheless, it is important that you see your regular**

**doctor. He or she may wish to organise an electrical reading of your heart (ECG) and check your bloods to assess your thyroid gland.**

**Q. I seem to get recurring waterworks problems, but every time I give my doctor a urine sample to send off, I'm told there is no infection. Please could you explain? - Eleanor, 61**

**A. You may be suffering from a condition known as atrophic vaginitis, which happens after the**

**menopause, when oestrogen levels drop. This causes your vaginal tissues to become drier which can predispose to bladder infections. However, if your urine samples do not show any infection, it is unlikely that antibiotics will provide relief. You may benefit from an oestrogen gel which can be applied directly to the vagina itself. Unlike oral oestrogen tablets, which may be unsuitable for some ladies with other medical conditions, oestrogen gel or cream is suitable for the majority of women.**

**If you have a question for Dr Zak, please email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com  
W: doctorzak.co.uk  
T: @AskDoctorZak**

**Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.**