

Epstein-Barr virus causes fatigue

DR. GOTT



PETER GOTT, M.D.

DEAR DR. GOTT: My 47-year-old daughter has been diagnosed with Epstein-Barr virus. Could you please give me some information on this disease and advise what the outcome might be?

DEAR READER: Epstein-Barr virus is the cause of infectious mononucleosis. This acute disease is common in young adults and is marked by fever, fatigue, sore throat, tonsillitis, swollen glands, an enlarged spleen and — occasionally — liver inflammation (hepatitis).

Almost all patients with mononucleosis recover without treatment; the illness runs its course in about two weeks and its victims return to normal activity and good health.

In a small number of cases, mononucleosis becomes chronic, or returns in cycles. The reason for this is unknown, but the virus causes a syndrome of chronic fatigue that can be quite debilitating. This is known as chronic Epstein-Barr virus syndrome.

Once the Epstein-Barr virus enters the body, it causes an immune response. That is, the body's tissues recognize the invader as threatening, and infection-fighting cells produce antibodies (protein antidotes) to the virus. These antibodies can be measured in the bloodstream.

Through sophisticated analyses, most laboratories can determine whether the antibodies reflect acute illness, or whether the proteins are simply holdovers from a past infection. Most patients who have recovered from mononucleosis continue to manufacture antibodies to the Epstein-Barr virus for several years, long after the initial infection has disappeared.

The interpretation of Epstein-Barr

antibodies can be a problem in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome. Many people are chronically tired, even exhausted, and doctors have long hoped to find a consistent physical cause for this ailment. A few years ago, several reports showed a high proportion of Epstein-Barr antibodies in patients with chronic fatigue. The answer to the syndrome was thought to be persisting mononucleosis.

However, this was just a scientific tease. Subsequent studies revealed that many normal, non-fatigued people — without symptoms — had measurable levels of Epstein-Barr antibodies. Therefore, the presence of these antibodies was not the differentiating factor between the two groups of fatigued and non-fatigued persons, except in isolated instances. Experts have had to retreat to square one to find a cause for chronic fatigue syndrome.

If your daughter has acute mononucleosis, she will probably recover eventually. If, on the other hand, her doctor has demonstrated Epstein-Barr antibodies in her blood and attributes chronic fatigue to them, your daughter's problem may require further diagnosis. Depression, anemia and an underactive thyroid gland often cause chronic fatigue.

For additional information, I suggest you contact the EBV support group known as Epstein-Barr Virus Association at P.O. Box 230108, Portland, OR 97223.

In the event you might want a second opinion, I am sending you a free copy of my Health Report "Choosing a Physician."

DEAR DR. GOTT: I've been diagnosed with Paget's disease. How could I have picked it up, and just what is it? I'm currently taking Didronel twice daily and Xanax before going to bed for pain. My doctor tells me not to expect relief from the pain for at least six weeks.

DEAR READER: Paget's disease of bone, a common disorder of unknown cause, affects older adults. It is characterized by areas of rapid bone destruction and production, leading to softened, enlarged bones that may be painful and break easily. The disease usually affects spotty portions of the skull, spinal column and legs.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "I probably carry more scar tissue on my derriere than any other candidate — that's political scar tissue." — Alexander Haig

TODAY'S MOON: Between new moon (Nov. 28) and first quarter (Dec. 5).



ON AN AVERAGE DAY: Eight Americans begin service with the Peace Corps.

Sour: "On An Average Day," by Tom Heymann (Fawcett Columbine)

TODAY'S BARBS BY PHIL PASTORET

Trouble sleeping? Throw out the sleeping pills and potions and buy a plumbing-supply catalog for reading at bedtime.

One way to get away from the yapping of a mobile phone is to park under a bridge with a steel deck that damps out the signal.

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Paget's disease is not communicable; you cannot "catch" it from someone else, nor do you get it by doing (or not doing) something. It is a metabolic disorder and can exist for many years without causing symptoms.

Treatment consists of drugs to retard the rate of bone turnover and to force additional calcium into weakened bones. Didronel is such a drug, as is calcitonin, a newer treatment that shows promise. Several weeks must pass before the medicine begins to alleviate symptoms. You seem to be receiving appropriate therapy for your condition.

Xanax, an anti-anxiety medicine, is not a common treatment for Paget's disease. It is useful for people with extreme nervousness. Since Xanax will not control your pain, ask your doctor to prescribe one of the many analgesics now available — or try over-the-counter pain relievers such as aspirin.

To give you more information, I am sending you a free copy of my Health Report "Managing Chronic Pain."

DEAR DR. GOTT: For the last 3½ years, I've been suffering from viral cardiomyopathy. I have no strength or energy and can do no work. What's my prognosis?

DEAR READER: Many types of virus affect the heart. Although most forms of viral heart inflammation heal themselves, some progress to a chronic state in which the heart muscle becomes flabby and irreparably damaged. This is called viral cardiomyopathy.

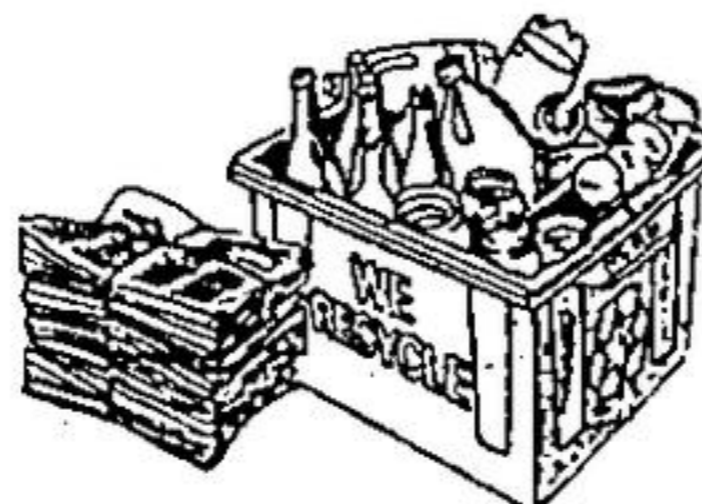
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THE WORLD ALMANAC DATE BOOK

Dec. 2, 1989

Today is the 336th day of 1989 and the 72nd day of autumn.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S

TODAY'S HISTORY: On this day in 1859, John Brown was hanged at Charlestown for treason against the state of Virginia.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Charlie Ventura (1916-), musician; Alexander Haig (1924-), government official; Julie Harris (1925-), actress; Edwin Meese III (1931-), former attorney general; Tracy Austin (1962-), tennis player.

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