

Sjögren's Syndrome & You

What is it?



Sjögren's syndrome is a chronic (long-term) autoimmune disease that causes dryness of the eyes and mouth, joint pain, and fatigue. It typically affects people between the ages of 30 and 50 years.

The exact cause of Sjögren's syndrome is unknown at this time, but it is an autoimmune disease. This means that something triggers your immune system to go awry. It begins to your body including the glands that are responsible for producing a variety of fluids. The most common glands that are affected are the tear glands and salivary glands. Other glands and other types of tissue can also be affected.



Sjögren's is like a chameleon

Sjögren's can look like a different disease in different people. Symptoms depend on which glands and other connective tissues the disease affects. Usually the tear and salivary glands are affected but the disease can affect other connective tissues, nerves, and joints, causing symptoms similar to other types of arthritis.

What is it going to do to me?



Often people with Sjögren's have eyes that feel dry and gritty. This dryness usually gets worse as the day goes on. Dry mouth is another common symptom. This can make swallowing difficult and can cause dental problems. Like other autoimmune diseases, fatigue is very common in people with Sjögren's syndrome. That's because the immune system is "turned on" all the time.

In some people the affected glands swell up. This usually occurs in glands in the face and neck.

Some people with Sjögren's syndrome also have arthritis and achy, stiff and swollen joints. Painful symptoms of fibromyalgia can also affect people with Sjögren's.

Sjögren's syndrome can also affect the nerves. This is especially true in the lower legs where it can cause numbness, pain, and burning. This is sometimes accompanied by a rash.

The good news is that many cases of Sjögren's syndrome can be mild and symptoms can be managed. In rare cases Sjögren's can be severe and affect other connective tissues such as the skin, brain, heart, and lungs.

Visit RheumInfo.com



RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about Sjögren's syndrome and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

What can I do about it?



People with Sjögren's syndrome can lead active and productive lives with the right kinds of treatment. Because the disease can be very different in different people, your treatment plan will be tailored just for you. Treating symptoms of Sjögren's usually involves a combination of good hygiene and medications.

Good eye hygiene and lid care is important. Keep your eyes clean and get a good pair of glasses or sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun and wind. Using artificial tears during the day and a jelly lubricant at night can provide relief from dry eyes.

Regularly brush and floss your teeth to prevent cavities. Dry mouth can be relieved by chewing sugar-free gum, sucking on sugarless mints, using a lubricant spray or drinking clear fluids like water.

Balancing daily activities with the need to rest can help you manage fatigue.

There are many medications that can be used for the treatment of Sjögren's depending on your specific symptoms. Although they do not cure the disease, they can make living with the condition much more comfortable.

Here are some other recommendations on what you should do:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your rheumatologist appointments regularly**
- **Get your blood tests regularly as suggested by your doctor**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat Sjögren's syndrome**
- **If you smoke cigarettes, try to quit**