

# PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

## What is Sjögren's Syndrome?

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Sjögren's syndrome is an autoimmune disease in which your body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy glands of the eyes and mouth. This syndrome can occur independently, or with other autoimmune conditions. Sjögren's syndrome typically affects females in the age range of 30-50 with a female to male predominance.<sup>1</sup>

The hallmark of disease symptoms include fatigue, joint pain, and oral and eye dryness.

### COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Dry eyes
- Dry mouth
- Dental caries
- Problems swallowing
- Joint pain
- Morning stiffness
- Fatigue

Not everyone will experience the same symptoms, and symptoms can highly vary from person to person. Figure 1 outlines common organ system symptoms. Furthermore, the syndrome will affect everyone to different degrees, from mild to severe. Although some symptoms can be tolerated, it is important to start therapy as soon as possible to prevent organ damage.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to get regular eye exams with your ophthalmologist as well as to follow up with your dentist to prevent and treat cavity formation and tooth decay.

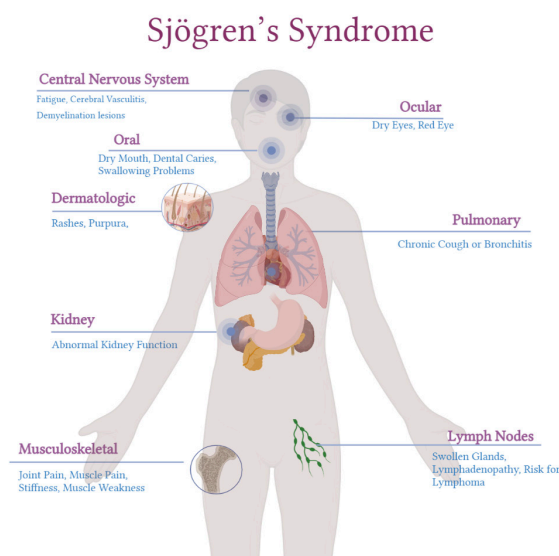


Figure 1: Organ systems and symptoms of Sjögren's Syndrome

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### HOW IS SJÖGREN'S SYNDROME DIAGNOSED?

- **Symptoms<sup>3</sup>**

- Dry mouth
- Dental caries
- Problems swallowing
- Joint pain
- Morning stiffness
- Fatigue

- **Testing<sup>3</sup>**

- Blood tests to evaluate for specific antibodies (ANA and anti-SSA/SSB)
- Eye lubrication testing or Schirmer's test
- Saliva gland biopsy

### HOW IS SJÖGREN'S SYNDROME DIAGNOSED?

Unfortunately, there is no cure for the disease. Treatment is focused on easing the severity of symptoms and preventing complications.

- For dry eyes, you can use artificial eye drops, or take medication to increase lubricating tear production.
- For dry mouth, patients have found sucking lozenges, chewing gum, and increasing fluid intake to be helpful.
- Sometimes, patient symptoms can be widespread, requiring steroids and immune-suppressing drugs such as methotrexate and azathioprine.<sup>3</sup>

### SOURCES

1. West, S. G., & Koltenbach, J. (2020). *Rheumatology Secrets*. Philadelphia: Elsevier.
2. Mavragani, C. P., & Moutsopoulos, H. M. (2014). Sjögren syndrome. *CMAJ*, 186.
3. André, F., & Böckle, B. C. (2022). Sjögren's syndrome. *Journal der Deutschen Dermatologischen Gesellschaft*, 980-1002.

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