



Sjögren's Fact Sheet

Sjögren's is the 2nd most common rheumatic autoimmune disease affecting as many as four million Americans. However, it takes an average of approximately five years to properly diagnose this disease from the time when initial symptoms appear. Dry mouth, dry eyes, fatigue and joint pain are hallmark symptoms of Sjögren's but many patients also experience other issues throughout the entire body. Because moisture is so vital to healthy bodily systems such as digestion and vision, the significant delay in managing the symptoms of Sjögren's can result in serious complications, including damage to vital organs and systems throughout the body. This fact sheet explains the causes of Sjögren's, the symptoms associated with the disease, challenges in diagnosis and treatment options.

What is Sjögren's?

Sjögren's (pronounced SHOW-grins), identified by Swedish physician Henrik Sjögren in 1933, is a chronic autoimmune disease in which the body attacks the exocrine glands – the glands that produce moisture needed in the mouth, skin, eyes, vaginal area, gastrointestinal tract and respiratory tract. Exocrine glands include the salivary glands, which produce saliva, an essential body fluid critical to overall digestive and oral health. The exact cause of Sjögren's is unknown. However, scientists believe that genetic factors and environmental contacts to certain viruses or bacteria may increase the risk of developing the disease. Although none of these factors are directly associated with the disease, scientists believe that there may be a link to Sjögren's.

What are the symptoms of Sjögren's?

The hallmark symptoms are dry mouth, dry eyes, fatigue and joint pain. Patients may experience many other symptoms as well which include:

- Dry, gritty or burning sensation in the eyes
- Difficulty talking, chewing or swallowing
- Sore or cracked tongue
- Dry or burning throat
- Dry, peeling lips
- Dry nose
- Vaginal and skin dryness
- Change in taste or smell
- Increased dental decay
- Digestive problems

Symptoms often vary from person to person and may worsen, stay the same or, uncommonly, go into remission. Some patients experience only mild discomfort from their symptoms, while others may incur damage to internal organs or various systems in the body such as circulatory, digestive, nervous and respiratory, greatly impairing their daily functioning.

Who is most likely to develop Sjögren's?

Nine (9) out of ten (10) people who develop Sjögren's are women. Most patients are diagnosed in their late 40s. However, the disease has been recognized in nearly all racial and ethnic groups and in all age groups, including children.

How is Sjögren's diagnosed?

Sjögren's is often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. A diagnosis may be difficult because symptoms can vary from person to person and may mimic those of menopause, drug side effects or medical conditions such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and multiple sclerosis. Because all symptoms are not always present at the same time, clinicians sometimes treat each symptom individually rather than systemically (the body as a whole).

Clinicians use a range of criteria to help identify patients with Sjögren's, including changes in salivary and lacrimal (eye) gland function, dryness symptoms and systemic symptoms. Rheumatologists are primarily responsible for diagnosing and managing the disease, although a patient's care team may also include eye doctors and dentists. No single test can confirm Sjögren's; however, a battery of tests are available to assist in diagnosis.

- Blood tests measure inflammation or detect certain antibodies found in most patients with the disease
- Eye tests measure tear production or examine the surface of the eye for dry spots
- Salivary tests measure saliva production or examine tissue from the salivary gland

How is Sjögren's treated?

While there is no known cure for Sjögren's, treatments are available that may improve symptoms and prevent complications. With early diagnosis and proper treatment, many patients are able to manage their symptoms so they can continue to lead full lives.

Where can I get more information about Sjögren's?

For more information about Sjögren's, please visit www.Sjogrens.org or call (301) 530-4420.

Sjögren's Fast Facts

- Sjögren's is pronounced "SHOW-grins"
- The hallmark symptoms are dry eyes, dry mouth, fatigue and joint pain, but the disease is systemic, affecting the entire body.
- Sjögren's is the 2nd most common autoimmune disease affecting as many as four million Americans.
- Early diagnosis and proper treatment may prevent serious complications and greatly improve the quality of life for individuals living Sjögren's
- Nine out of ten patients are women.
- It takes an average of 4.7 years to receive a proper diagnosis.
- In January 2012, the SSF launched a 5-Year Breakthrough Goal, "50in5":
"To shorten the time to diagnose Sjögren's by 50% in 5 years!"
- The Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation is the only national organization focused on increasing research, education and awareness for Sjögren's.