

The Foundation thanks Anne E. Burke, MD, MPH for authoring this Patient Education Sheet.

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Sjögren's can affect women's sexuality, but even with the presence of Sjögren's, women and their partners can enjoy sexual activity and maintain a state of sexual well-being.

Vaginal dryness: Women with Sjögren's often experience vaginal dryness.

What you can do about it:

- Some over-the-counter vaginal moisturizers may help relieve vaginal dryness. For example, Replens® contains a compound called polycarbophil, Luvena® contains prebiotics, and Feminease® contains Yerba Santa.
- Lubricants, such as K-Y jelly®, SYLK®, or Astroglide®, may help increase lubrication for intercourse.
- Vaginal estrogen (hormones) may be right for some women. This can come in cream, ring, or pill form.
- Try different techniques to make sex more comfortable, such as more foreplay or masturbation.

Pelvic pain/pain with intercourse: Pelvic pain can have many causes, including Sjögren's, pudendal neuropathy, and interstitial cystitis.

What you can do about it:

- See your health care provider (Gyn/Urologist) for an evaluation of why you have pelvic pain. There may not be an "easy" answer, but in many cases a possible cause can be identified and treated.
- Treating vaginal dryness may improve some pelvic pain.
- Some women will benefit from pelvic physical therapy. Your health care provider may be able to refer you to a physical therapist with pelvic floor expertise.

Fatigue and mood symptoms: Fatigue, chronic pain, and depression can contribute to daily challenges of living with a chronic illness and affect sexual desire and function.

What you can do about it:

- Tell your health care provider if you are feeling depressed. Treating depression may help to improve problems with sexual function.
- Recognize that some antidepressant medications may contribute to sexual symptoms and dryness. Discuss this with your provider.
- Take care of your Sjögren's and make time for yourself and things you enjoy.
- Remember that fatigue and chronic pain can affect a woman's sex life. Be open with your partner about your experience and needs and work together for satisfying intimacy.

For more information on Sjögren's, visit the Foundation website at www.sjogrens.org, call 301-530-4420, email info@sjogrens.org, or write to the Sjögren's Foundation, 10701 Parkridge Blvd, Ste 170, Reston, VA 20191