

WHAT IS SJÖGREN'S SYNDROME?

Sjögren's Syndrome is a Systemic Autoimmune Disease

As Many as 4 Million Americans Have Sjögren's Disease

Sjögren's Syndrome is an autoimmune disease that can affect anyone at any age. Symptoms can vary in type and intensity, but many patients can live fairly normal lives with proper treatment.

The following guide has been prepared to increase awareness on what Sjögren's Syndrome is, its symptoms, diagnosis and treatment.

01 | Defining Sjögren's Syndrome

Sjögren's Syndrome is categorized as an autoimmune disease. Autoimmune diseases are characterized by the abnormal production of antibodies causing a misdirection of the immune system, which leads to inflammation of the targeted tissues. The exact cause of Sjögren's is unknown; however, patients with family members affected by autoimmune diseases are at a higher risk.

02 | Symptoms

Sjögren's Syndrome primarily affects the salivary and tear glands. Inflammation of the tear gland causes dry eye and can progress into eye irritation, decreased tear production, eye infection and abrasion of the cornea. Inflammation of the salivary glands leads to a number of symptoms including:

- Dry mouth
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dental decay, cavities and gum disease
- Mouth sores
- Impaired voice
- Abnormalities or loss of taste
- Dry cough

Complications can arise from infections of the eyes, breathing passages and the mouth. Problems that may arise outside of the gland inflammation include fatigue, joint pain, lymph node enlargement, muscle weakness and lung and kidney complications.

03 | Diagnosis & Treatment

Preliminary testing is simple and includes a Schirmer's Test to identify the dryness of the eye by placing a test strip under the eyelid and a salivary flow test to measure saliva production. Further testing of the salivary glands by means of a biopsy and radiologic nuclear medicine give a better confirmation of symptoms. Blood tests can confirm the presence of specific antibodies, rheumatoid factor, low red blood count or abnormal levels of inflammation markers.

Once a positive diagnosis has been made, treatment will include proper dental care and careful observation of the mouth, drinking plenty of water, humidifying the air, prescription medications and glycerin swabs to keep the mouth moistened and healthy. Immunosuppressive drugs may be prescribed for fatigue, muscle and joint pain. With proper management of symptoms, the outlook for patients is generally good.

For more information on Sjögren's Syndrome, please visit: <https://www.sjogrens.org/home/about-sjogrens>

Did You Know?

9 out of 10 Sjögren's patients are women

References

http://www.medicinenet.com/sjogrens_syndrome/article.htm

<http://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Sjogrens-Syndrom>