



## **SJOGRENS SYNDROME**

### **What is Sjogren's syndrome?**

Sjogren's syndrome is a disease that affects the glands that make moisture. It causes dryness of mouth and/or eyes. It may also cause joint pains, fatigue and internal organ disease.

### **Who are likely to develop Sjogren's syndrome ?**

Women are 9 times more likely to develop Sjogren's syndrome than men. Average age of diagnosis is 40 though it can affect all ages and sexes.

### **What causes Sjogrens syndrome?**

Exact cause is not known. Sjogren's syndrome is an autoimmune disease in which body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own organs. In this disease the immune system predominantly attacks organs which are responsible for production of saliva (salivary glands in mouth) and tears (lacrimal glands in eyes). An immune attack on these glands leads to decreased production of saliva and tears leading to dryness of mouth and eyes respectively.

### **What are the symptoms of Sjogren's syndrome?**

Though dryness of various body organs is the most common symptom in Sjogrens syndrome, as it is a multisystem disease it can present with varied symptoms

- ❖ Dry eyes
- ❖ Foreign body sensation or grittiness in eyes
- ❖ Dry mouth
- ❖ Difficulty in swallowing ,talking and chewing
- ❖ Dry skin
- ❖ Increased tooth caries/decay
- ❖ Joint pains
- ❖ Excessive Tiredness
- ❖ Dry nose
- ❖ Dry cough
- ❖ Muscle pain / weakness
- ❖ Red rashes in the skin
- ❖ Thyroid problems
- ❖ Numbness and tingling in hands and feet
- ❖ Heartburn
- ❖ Vaginal dryness
- ❖ Painful intercourse



## **How is Sjogrens syndrome diagnosed ?**

This disease is often misdiagnosed or under diagnosed. Rheumatologist is the doctor trained in diagnosing and treating Sjogrens syndrome. After a detailed history, appropriate clinical examination your Rheumatologists will order for some investigations which include blood tests, urine tests and special tests in the eye and mouth. You may be examined by an ophthalmologist (eye doctor), simple tests may be performed on the eye to test the tear flow. Lower Lip biopsy to look for involvement of salivary glands is usually part of diagnostic tests. It is relatively painless minor procedure usually done by dentist. Special immunological tests like Rheumatoid Factor, ANA (Antinuclear Antibody) and ANA profile may also be usually ordered.

## **Is there a cure for Sjogren's syndrome ?**

Currently there is no cure for Sjogrens syndrome. But early diagnosis and treatment can prevent complications

## **How is Sjogrens syndrome treated ?**

Treatment varies from patient to patient depending on the organ affected.

### ***Dry eyes and mouth :***

In addition to artificial tears and saliva, medications like pilocarpine and cevimeline may be prescribed to increase the secretions.

### ***Pain killers and steroids :***

Pain killers and steroids may be prescribed as and when needed to treat joint pains. Steroids are also used to treat severe internal organ diseases

### ***Immunosuppressives :***

Some patients are prescribed immunosuppressives like methotrexate, hydroxychloroquine, azathioprine, mycophenolate depending on the internal organ involved.

## **Life style modifications for dry mouth**

- Eat soft, moist foods
- Eat smaller and more frequent meals to stimulate salivary flow
- Avoid salty, acidic, spicy, crunchy tough foods and carbonated drinks which interfere with digestion
- Maintain good oral hygiene by proper brushing, flossing .
- Use alcohol and sugar free mouthwashes
- Regular dental check ups
- Drink plenty of liquids as advised by doctor
- Chew sugar free gum or lozenges or suck sugar free candies to increase saliva flow
- Apply moisturizing gels/vitamin E to dry or sore parts of mouth or tongue for relief

## **Life style modifications for dry eyes**



- Wear sunglasses, shields to prevent moisture evaporation
- Protect eyes from strong air currents that may irritate and aggravate dryness
- Clean the eye lids with clean warm water and mild soap
- Use non preserved artificial tears as advised by doctor
- Avoid regular application of chemicals, commercial products and make up to your eyes
- Ointments and gels can blur the vision, if prescribed must be used in the nights
- Use humidifier at nights to prevent dryness of eyes

#### **Life style modifications for dry skin**

- Use warm water instead of hot water for bathing.
- After taking bath, apply Vaseline/moisturizing cream or oil immediately to seal the moisture
- Use sunscreen lotion with minimum SPF 30 on sun exposed areas while going outdoors

#### **Life style modifications for dry nose**

- Use Saline sprays, humidifiers to keep the nose moist and crust free
- Avoid air conditioned environment especially in dry mode