



spotlight on health

Dryness As A Lifelong Disease

(NAPSA)—A chronic disease is one that may remain with you for the rest of your life. Although you will face both physical and emotional demands on a daily basis, there are strategies for rising above these difficulties. Learning to cope with your condition is important in maintaining your quality of life and in dealing with any chronic disease.

One chronic disease that merits attention is Sjögren's syndrome (pronounced SHOW-grins). Sjögren's syndrome is a chronic, autoimmune disease characterized by dryness symptoms, in which the immune system mistakenly recognizes the body's own moisture-producing cells as foreign and attacks them. In addition to feminine dryness, a woman might experience an uncomfortable loss of moisture in her eyes, mouth, nose and on her skin. It is not uncommon for people with other autoimmune disorders, such as rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus, to experience the dryness symptoms associated with Sjögren's syndrome. Ninety percent of the one million to four million people affected by this condition are women, mostly in their 40s and 50s.

Sjögren's syndrome affects people differently, so it's important to develop a treatment strategy that works best for you. Some people experience uncomfortable dryness of the mouth, which forces them to constantly sip water, while others may have a "gritty" feeling in the eyes. You may want to speak with



your doctor if you are experiencing dry-mouth symptoms because he or she may be able to prescribe medication to help relieve your symptoms. In addition to symptoms of dryness, pain and fatigue may be major issues. Dryness symptoms, however, are the most common complaints of people with Sjögren's syndrome.

When facing a chronic disease, like Sjögren's syndrome, you may find it helpful to participate in a support group. Support groups provide you an opportunity to share your own experiences and also learn how others manage their disease. Often, just knowing you are not alone can be a great source of comfort.

If you think you may be among the many Americans suffering from Sjögren's syndrome, you can learn more about the disease and support groups on the Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation Web site (www.sjogrens.org). Also, be sure to talk to your doctor about your dryness symptoms to learn how you can find relief.



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