



HEALTH AWARENESS

Is Sjögren's Syndrome Causing Your Dryness?

(NAPSA)—Sjögren's (pronounced SHOW-grins) syndrome is a common autoimmune disease that affects up to 4 million Americans. Women are most frequently affected with Sjögren's syndrome; in fact, nine of 10 people diagnosed with the condition are women. The symptoms of Sjögren's syndrome typically occur between 40 and 50 years of age.

While Sjögren's syndrome is a common condition, patients' symptoms often go unrecognized and untreated for as many as 10 years. Dry mouth and dry eye are the most frequently reported complaints associated with Sjögren's syndrome, with dry mouth occurring in 90 percent of cases. Sjögren's syndrome can also cause dryness of the skin and respiratory tract.

Sjögren's syndrome is not the only condition that can cause symptoms of dryness. In fact, there are many other causes of dryness that make the diagnosis of Sjögren's syndrome challenging.

In 2002, an American-European Consensus Group published a new set of more precise criteria to help physicians make an earlier and more accurate diagnosis. However, doctors and scientists continue to work hard to develop a list of more universally accepted "rules" or classification criteria that may help determine whether a patient's dryness is due to Sjögren's syndrome or another factor.

Key symptoms of Sjögren's syndrome are dryness of the mouth and eyes. If you experience at least one of the following symp-



Many middle-aged women suffer from uncomfortable dryness of the mouth and eyes.

toms, be sure to tell your doctor so he or she can begin to determine the cause of your dryness.

- Dry eyes for more than 3 months
- A recurrent feeling of sand or gravel in the eyes
- The need to use tear replacement drops more than 3 times a day
- Dry mouth for more than 3 months
- Persistently swollen salivary glands
- The need to drink liquids more frequently than usual to help you swallow your food

In order for your doctor to make an accurate diagnosis, it is important that you provide a complete medical history and list any medications you are taking, including over-the-counter, prescription, and even herbal remedies. Together, you and your doctor can determine what is causing your symptoms of dryness.



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