

# How is Sjögren's diagnosed and treated?

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# How is Sjögren's diagnosed?



- **Blood tests:** These tests detect specific antibodies in the blood. They look for anti-nuclear antibodies (ANA), anti-Sjögren's antibodies (anti-SSA, also called anti-Ro) and anti-Sjögren's type B (anti-SSB, also called anti-La). A blood test can also detect rheumatoid factor, an antibody found in many people who have rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Biopsy:** Your doctor may remove a small piece of tissue or cells from a salivary gland or the inside of your lip. This biopsy sample goes to a lab to check for signs of inflammation.
- **Eye exam:** An eye specialist, such as an ophthalmologist, can measure tear production. During an eye exam, your doctor will examine the cornea, the clear part of the eye, for dryness.
- **Sialometry:** An oral specialist can measure how much saliva you produce.
- **Imaging tests:** Like salivary scintigraphy, a way to have a look at your salivary glands and their function.

## Barriers to diagnosis and therapy

These are some of the problems a sufferer can come across:

- Patients present to different specialties, due to their varied symptoms
- Often symptoms are non-specific
- Long lead time before diagnosis
- Undiagnosed patients not receiving appropriate therapy

## Systemic complications

These are some of the complications that can affect a sufferer:

- Arthritis
- Raynaud's phenomenon
- Lung involvement
- Kidney involvement
- Neurological involvement
- Lymphoma

# Management and Treatment



To help relieve the symptoms of Sjögren's:

- Avoid dry, smoky or windy places
- Avoid reading, watching TV or looking at screens for a long time
- Make sure you maintain good oral hygiene
- Do not smoke and avoid drinking alcohol
- Receive information about self-help groups

There is currently no cure for Sjögren's, but the most common symptoms can usually be treated with specific medications and self-help measures.

Depending on your specific issues, your doctor may recommend one or more of these therapies.

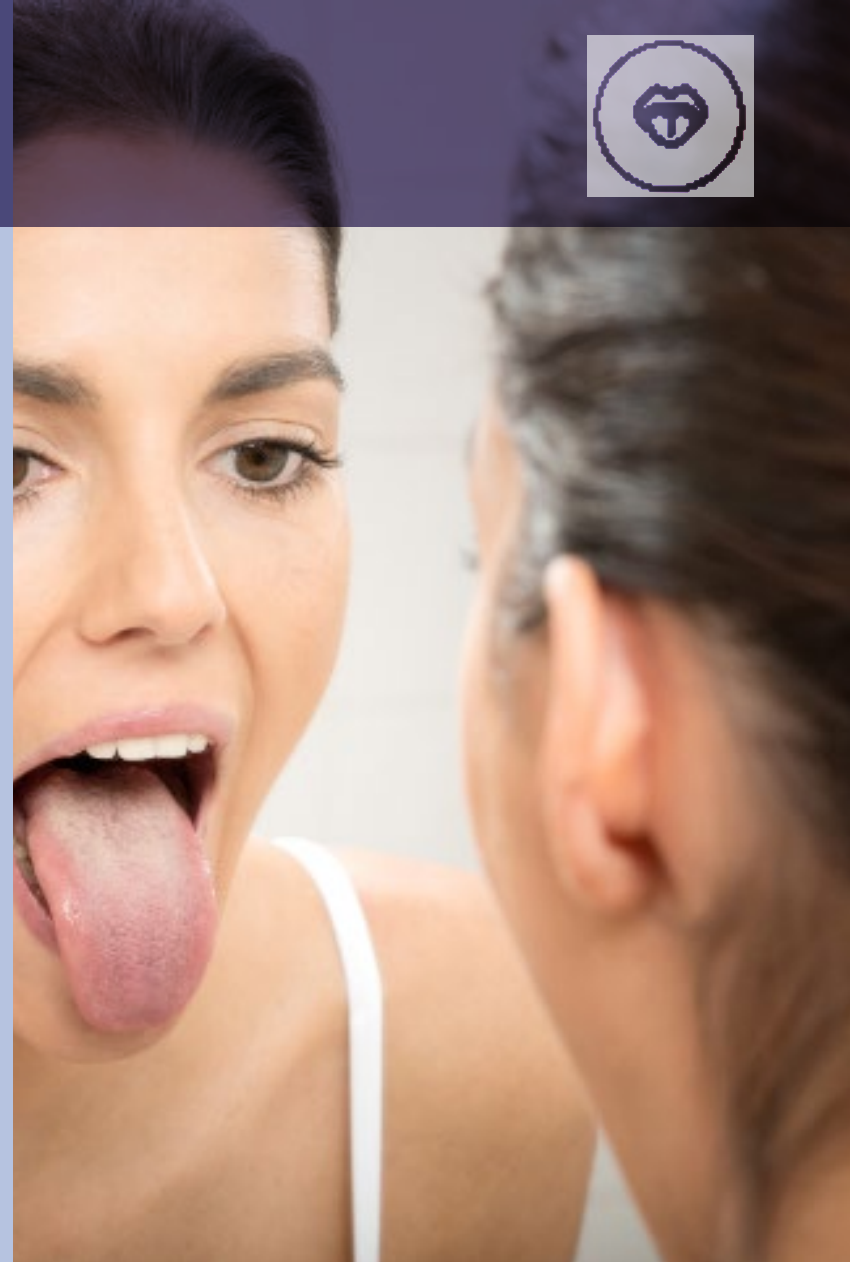
## Treatments for dry eyes:

- **Artificial tears:** Over-the-counter artificial tear eye solutions and artificial tear eye ointments to moisturize dry eyes. These products may relieve irritation and discomfort.
- **Prescription eye drops:** like ciclosporin eye drops
- **Punctal plugs:** An ophthalmologist inserts tiny silicone plugs into the tear ducts. The plugs block the ducts, so tears stay on the eyes, keeping them wet.
- **Autologous serum drops:** Your doctor can make customized artificial tears. The process involves mixing your blood serum (a clear liquid separated from your blood) with a sterile liquid solution. You receive a one-of-a-kind tear substitute unique to your body.



# Treatments for dry mouth:

- **Saliva producers:** Products such as gum and hard candies that contain sweeteners like sorbitol or xylitol can stimulate saliva production.
- **Saliva substitutes:** These are available over-the-counter or on prescription.
- **Prescription medications:** for example, pilocarpine or cevimeline which stimulate the production of saliva
- **Dental care:** People with Sjögren's are at increased risk for dental cavities. You should brush and floss after eating meals and snacks. It is important for you to visit your dentist at least every six months for a cleaning and evaluation.
- Toothpastes designed specifically for people with dry mouth are available. These lack the detergents that are present in many types of toothpaste but can irritate a dry mouth. Toothbrushes with special features that help clean between the teeth (including electric toothbrushes) may also help to keep your teeth clean.
- Toothpaste with fluoride (or a special fluoride rinse or varnish) may help to prevent cavities. A fluoride treatment after each dental cleaning may also be helpful.



## Dry skin

- Moisturising creams and lotions
- Do not use strong, perfumed soaps





## Treatments for joint or organ problems:

- **Over-the-counter pain relievers:** Acetaminophen (Paracetamol) and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and naproxen, can relieve joint pain and muscle aches.
- **Systemic immunomodulatory/immunosuppressive therapies:** glucocorticoids (prednisone), antimalarials (hydroxychloroquine), immunosuppressive agents, intravenous immunoglobulins, and biologics. These prescription medications slow the immune system's response. They lessen inflammation and prevent organ damage. They should be restricted to patients with active systemic disease
- **Antifungals:** These medications treat yeast overgrowth in your mouth (oral thrush/candida) or in your vagina (vaginal yeast infection).



## Vaginal dryness

Tips for helping with everyday vaginal dryness include:

- Trying vaginal moisturizers or lubricants to add moisture to the vagina daily and to ease sexual intercourse.
- Using unscented soaps for cleansing. Perfumes and other additives can cause irritation.
- Asking your healthcare provider about vaginal oestrogen therapy.



# What questions should I ask my doctor if I have Sjögren's?

If you have Sjögren's, you may want to ask your doctor:

- What lifestyle measures can I take to make my symptoms easier to manage?
- Can certain medications, drinks or foods dry out the eyes or mouth?
- Should I look out for any signs of complications?



## Sources:

BSSA

Arthritis Research UK

NHS

Cleveland Clinic

Sjögren's Foundation

[www.uptodate.com](http://www.uptodate.com)

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6911247/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6911247/)

[www.ard.bmj.com/content/79/1/3](http://www.ard.bmj.com/content/79/1/3)

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