

Sjögren's Syndrome (Sicca)

Sjögren's syndrome is a disorder of the immune system that causes dryness of mucous membranes, especially the eyes and mouth, as a result of decreased production of tears and saliva. It primarily affects middle-aged women and worsens with stress. The symptoms may subside at times. It is sometimes associated with rheumatic diseases. It does not cause serious problems for most patients and allows them to live normal lives.

What problems does it cause?

It can cause **dry eyes** and sometimes can lead to damage to the eyes, and **dry mouth**, tooth decay, gum inflammation and difficulty eating. It can also cause dry nose, gastrointestinal problems, bronchitis, painful intercourse, joint pain, chronic fatigue, anxiety and depression.

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What can I do about it?

Keep your work and home environments humid. Avoid dry, dusty environments that are closed, smoky, overheated or air-conditioned. If you smoke, you must quit. Sip water frequently throughout the day. The dryness will improve if you get the proper amount of sleep. Avoid



taking medications that cause dryness. Mild exercise can help relieve pain.

For your lips: use lip balms or lipstick.

For your skin: use moisturizing cream and mild soaps and shampoos.

For your mouth: sugar-free candy or gum, or artificial saliva can help relieve dry mouth. Brush your teeth with liquid fluoride toothpaste. See your dentist regularly.



For your eyes: wear wraparound sunglasses or glasses with side shields. Avoid spending too much time watching TV or on the computer. Apply artificial tears often, even if you don't feel any discomfort. You can use a lubricating eye ointment at night. Some patients use swim goggles when they sleep to keep their eyes moist. Do not use contact lenses. You cannot have surgery for correcting myopia.

For your nose: if you notice your nose is becoming dry and crusty, use a saline solution nasal spray as often as you need.

To make **sexual intercourse** more comfortable, use a vaginal lubricant.