



# What is Sjögren's?

Sjögren's is a disease that is characterized by an inflammation of glands leading to dry eyes (xerophthalmia) and dry mouth (xerostomia). Dryness can also affect other parts of the body inside and out (nose, genitals, lungs, skin, etc.). Sjögren's can affect the whole body. Patients with Sjögren's often experience extensive fatigue and chronic pain.

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## Sjögren's is a condition that is:

- Chronic: there is no cure although there are symptomatic and systemic treatments for the symptoms.
- Systemic: it can affect the whole body (glandular and extraglandular manifestations).
- Rheumatic: Sjögren's is characterized by an inflammation of the connective tissue (the tissue that connects, separates, and supports all other types of tissues in the body).
- Autoimmune: the immune system attacks some healthy tissues of the body that it is supposed to protect; in Sjögren's, the immune system specifically attacks the connective tissue of the exocrine glands (those that secrete substances on the body surface through a duct).

More than 90% of patients are women, with a mean age of 50 years at diagnosis. The disease occurs in all races and all ages.

Sjögren's can express alone (often described as primary Sjögren's) or can be associated with another systemic or organ-specific autoimmune disease like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, scleroderma, etc. (often described as secondary Sjögren's).

## What causes Sjögren's?



Sjögren's is an autoimmune disease, which means something triggers your immune system to attack healthy cells. This attack especially damages the tear system in your eyes and the salivary glands in your mouth.

Exactly what causes this abnormal immune system response is not clear. These factors may play a role:

- Environmental factors.
- Genetics.
- Sex hormones (the condition affects more women than men).
- Viral infections.



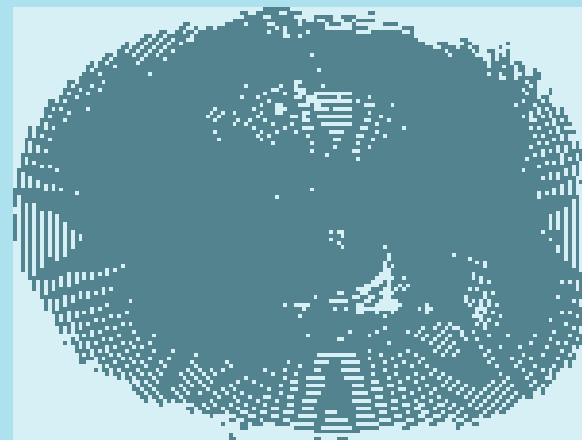
# What are the Symptoms?

The symptoms of Sjögren's include:

- Dry eyes: your eyes may be dry and feel sore, irritable, or gritty.
- Dry mouth: your mouth may become dry, and you may have mouth ulcers. Swallowing may be difficult, and your sense of taste may be altered.
- Tiredness/fatigue (extreme): this is one of the most common symptoms. Some people may also feel 'down' or depressed.
- Dry skin.
- Vaginal dryness.
- Muscle or joint pain.
- Swelling between the jaw and ears (swollen salivary glands).

Several studies have shown that the health-related quality of life of patients with Primary Sjögren's is significantly decreased and is comparable with that of patients with conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).

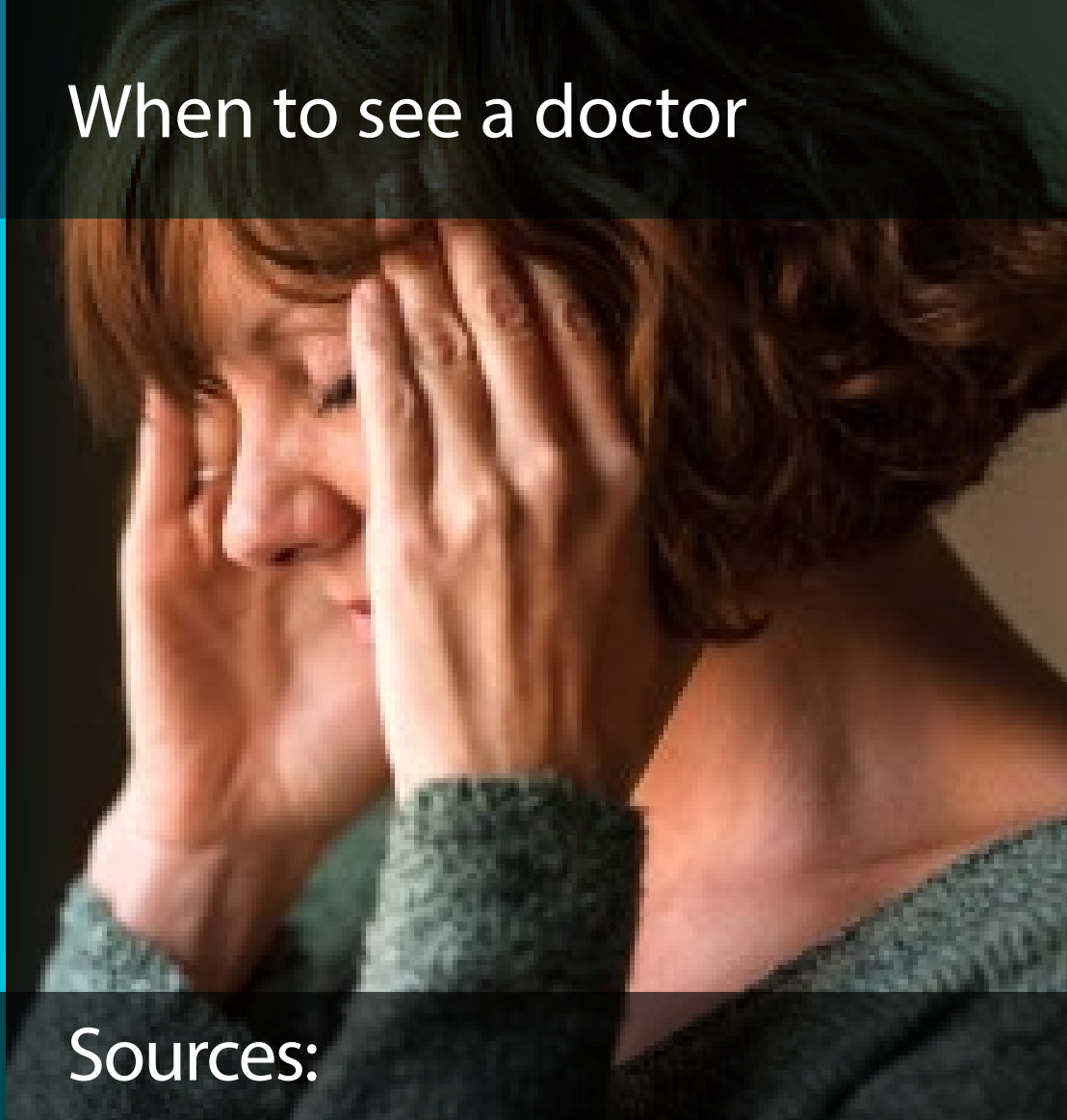
Serious complications occasionally occur, for example, Malt lymphoma. Some patients develop other systemic complications such as neuropathies. Prompt diagnosis and treatment may prevent these complications from happening.





# When to see a doctor

There are many things that can cause similar symptoms. The doctor can check for some of the more common causes, such as swelling of the eyelids, diabetes or side effects from medicine and if needed, they can refer you to a specialist for further tests.



## Sources:

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