

# **SJÖGREN'S DISEASE IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS**



**Understanding a complex autoimmune  
condition from an early age**

**Sjögren's Disease can affect children  
and young people, often in ways that are different  
from adults and harder to recognise.**

# What is Sjögren?



**Sjögren** is an autoimmune disease which commonly affects adults, but which can also be diagnosed in children and younger people. In this disease, the body's own immune system attacks by mistake its cells and tissues, and in particular the glands that produce your body's moisture, leading to inflammation of the glands and dryness as time goes on.

The condition was previously called "Sjögren's Syndrome", but in recognition of the serious and severe nature of the disease, we changed the name to "**Sjögren's Disease**" or simply Sjögren. This reflects the preferences of people affected by this condition.



## Types of Sjögren

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**Sjögren** when Sjögren manifests by itself, without any other disease or illness. About half of Sjögren's cases are not associated with another autoimmune condition. It was previously called Primary Sjögren's syndrome, but we are not using this terminology anymore.

We divide Sjögren into two types:

2

**Associated Sjögren** when this condition occurs along with other autoimmune disorders, such as juvenile lupus, juvenile dermatomyositis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, etc. It accounts roughly for the other half of Sjögren's cases. It was previously called Secondary Sjögren's syndrome, but we are not using this terminology anymore, as Sjögren's Disease is as important as any other condition it may be associated with.

# Symptoms of Sjögren

Symptoms can range from **mild to severe** – from mild discomfort to daily troublesome symptoms that can affect your overall quality of life. The two most easily recognisable symptoms of Sjögren are **dry eyes** and **dry mouth**; occasionally, these **are not present in young people** from the beginning of the disease. Sjögren can also lead to symptoms that **affect the entire body**. **Everyone is different**, and they may experience constant symptoms or symptoms that fluctuate over time.

## Symptoms you may experience include:

- Enlarged and painful glands around your neck
- Fever and feeling unwell
- Joint pain and swelling
- Dry cough
- Dry mouth (difficulty talking, chewing, swallowing)
- Dry eyes (gritty or burning feeling)
- Dry, peeling lips
- Tongue soreness or cracking
- Dry or sore throat
- Dental carries
- Skin dryness and rashes
- Vaginal dryness
- Dry nose
- Changes in taste or smell
- Fatigue
- Digestive issues
- Lung or kidney problems
- Headaches and nerve-related symptoms

## Diagnosis of Sjögren

Sjögren is often hard to diagnose because symptoms may resemble other conditions such as juvenile idiopathic arthritis, lupus, chronic fatigue, coeliac disease, thyroid disorders, fibromyalgia, or infections.

Rheumatologists use their expertise to diagnose children, as **adult diagnostic criteria are not always suitable**. Research is ongoing to improve diagnosis in children and adolescents.



## Diagnosis may include:

- Clinical evaluation
- Blood tests
- Eye and dental tests
- Imaging (ultrasound, MRI)
- A small saliva or tear gland sample in some cases

# Treatment

There is no cure for Sjögren, but treatments can help relieve symptoms. Care is usually guided by specialists such as rheumatologists, dentists, and eye doctors.

## What can you do at home:

- Avoid foods that worsen symptoms (spicy, acidic, hard foods)
- Prefer soft, easy-to-eat meals
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid drying medications (consult your doctor)

## Treatment may include:

- Eye and mouth drops
- Medications to stimulate saliva and moisture
- Steroids (short-term use)
- Immunosuppressive therapies
- Pain relief medication

- Use humidifiers
- Use eye lubricants regularly
- Maintain oral hygiene and dental care
- Avoid smoking, vaping and excess alcohol

## Special concerns in adolescents:

### Discuss with your doctor about the following issues:

- Facial appearance and gland swelling
- Feeling low or tired
- Joint pain
- Weight changes
- Social impact (speaking, eating in public)

- Emotional well-being
- School support
- Physical activity
- Pregnancy considerations
- Smoking and vaping

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