

# WOMEN'S HEALTH

## Don't Dismiss Mysterious Symptoms

(NAPSA)—A recent survey revealed many women could protect their health and happiness if they paid more attention to the signs of a chronic, potentially debilitating autoimmune disease.

Called Sjögren's (pronounced show-grins) syndrome, the disease damages the body's moisture-producing glands. It's believed to affect more than a million American women, but many remain undiagnosed.

Left untreated, the condition can make it difficult to swallow or speak. Pain, headache, tooth decay and digestive problems can also occur and people with Sjögren's are at greater risk for certain types of cancer.

Reports Alexis Stegemann, executive director of the Sjogren's Syndrome Foundation, "Ninety-percent of the people in the U.S. with Sjögren's Syndrome are women. Research shows that hundreds of thousands of women may be undiagnosed and untreated and many are suffering needlessly. We need to more aggressively inform women that these dryness symptoms—often dismissed as normal aging—may indicate a need to be treated."

While the disease can affect anyone at any age, the majority of patients diagnosed with it are women between the ages of 40 and 60. It is often confused with signs of menopause. The disease often occurs in patients with other



**If more women told their doctors about symptoms of dry mouth and similar problems, more could be treated for a potentially serious condition much sooner.**

autoimmune diseases such as lupus or rheumatoid arthritis.

The survey also found that almost one-third of women with dryness problems said the symptoms had forced them to limit their participation in recreational and social activities, and had a negative impact on their romantic relationships.

While there is no cure for Sjögren's, patients can alleviate many of the symptoms with over-the-counter products such as mouthwashes and saliva substitutes. Doctors can also offer prescription medications, that can increase saliva production. For additional information about this disease, call 800-730-7227.

You can also learn more from the non-profit Sjogren's Syndrome Foundation at [www.sjogrens.org](http://www.sjogrens.org).