

Sjögren's Syndrome and diet

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The first thing to highlight is that there is no evidence to suggest that there are any diets or supplements which will cure Sjögren's (pronounced Shurgren's) Syndrome however many people find that their symptoms significantly improve as a result of making simple modifications to their diet and lifestyle.

The Eatwell plate shows the different types of food we need to eat – and in what proportions – to have a well-balanced and healthy diet.

Based on the Eatwell plate:

- About a 1/3 of the daily diet should be made up of fruit and vegetables. 5 portions of fruit and vegetables should be the target.
- Another 1/3 of the daily diet should be made up of carbohydrate rich foods. At least one serving in each main meal.
- 2-3 portions of dairy foods such as pot of yogurt/200mls milk should be eaten each day. Dairy products are a good source of protein and vitamins as well as calcium, which helps to keep our bones healthy.
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans are all good sources of protein, which is essential for growth and repair of the body. 2-3 servings a day should be sufficient for the body's need e.g. a breast of chicken or a fillet of cod.
- The group made up of high fat and high sugar foods is the only group on Eatwell plate not essential to health. These foods should only make up a very small part of the diet and should be had occasionally as treats.

Vitamins and Minerals

As fatigue is a common symptom of SS, iron is very important as the extreme tiredness can be made worse by iron deficiency anaemia. Anaemia can occur as a result of inflammation of joints or because of long term use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs particularly in RA.

To tackle this, you should be eating iron rich foods regularly including red meat, eggs, pulses, green leafy vegetables and fortified breakfast cereals.



The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



Iron is more easily absorbed if you have it at the same time as vitamin C, so having one of your 5 a day with your iron source would help.

- Iron (red meat, oily fish, pulses, dark green leafy veg)
- Vitamin C (which aids the absorption of iron- found in fruit & veg)

Throat and Mouth

As you are aware, severity of symptoms vary from person to person, but dryness of the throat and mouth is a common symptom.

Dryness: (common symptom)

- Always having a drink at hand, sipping water or sucking ice cubes regularly can help to relieve the discomfort of a dry mouth.
- Alcohol, tea, coffee and other caffeinated drinks can be dehydrating, so have in moderation or avoid completely.
- Choose moist foods, using plenty of sauces and gravies.
- Artificial saliva may also be an option - discuss with your GP/ Specialist.

Soreness: (common symptom)

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Fruit juices tend to sting so either avoid or try less acidic juices including peach or pear.
- Very hot drinks may irritate so try having drinks that are lukewarm or at room temperature.

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- Drinking through a straw may provide some relief.
- Cold foods and drinks can be soothing.
- Be aware that salty or spicy food may sting, so choose plain foods and limit seasoning.
- Avoid rough textured food like toast/raw vegetables as they can scrape sore areas.

Dental health:

Having a dry and sore mouth puts you at more risk of dental problems.

- Limit sweet food and drinks to help reduce this risk.
- Brush your teeth regularly.
- Some people find that using a children's soft toothbrush to clean their teeth reduces the soreness of their mouths. Also avoid toothpicks.
- See your dentist for further support in this area.

Taste changes:

You may no longer enjoy certain foods and experience an altered sense of taste.

- Eat foods that you enjoy and temporarily ignore those that don't appeal to you. Advice in relation to taste changes is that you eat foods that you enjoy and temporarily ignore those that don't appeal to you. But do re-try foods again after 2 weeks as this taste change may have reversed.
- Using seasonings (spices/herbs) or marinating foods to add some flavour to cooking may help, however, if your mouth is sore this may cause irritation.
- Sharp-tasting foods like fresh fruit, fruit juices and bitter boiled sweets can be refreshing and leave a pleasant taste in the mouth. Again, if your mouth is sore this may just cause irritation.
- Many people find that cold food/drink may taste better than hot.



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Digestive Health

Fibre:

- Include plenty of high fibre sources in your diet: whole grain breakfast cereals, wholemeal bread/ pasta/flour, brown rice, fruit and vegetables (including pulses).
- Natural remedies for constipation include prune juice, prunes and syrup of figs.
- Laxatives are an alternative option.

Fluid:

- Drink at least two litres (3.5 pints) a day.

Exercise:

- Gentle exercise (including walking) helps keep the bowel healthy.



Omega 3 Fatty Acids

- Omega 3 fatty acids are a type of poly-unsaturated fat and are found predominately in fish oils.
- Evidence to suggest a high intake of omega 3 fatty acids helps reduce the main symptoms of Sjögren's Syndrome particularly dry eyes.
 - Evidence suggests that in addition to their heart health benefits by being cardio-protective, omega 3 fatty acids dampen general inflammation and may help to reduce joint pain and stiffness, particularly in RA.
 - Evidence suggests the type of omega 3 fatty acids direct from eating oily fish are the most beneficial, aim to eat at least 2-3 portions (100g/4oz) of oily fish per week: Mackerel, Trout, Kipper, Salmon, Herring, Sardine, Pilchard, tuna (fresh/frozen).
 - If you don't like fish, there are other sources including omega 3 supplements Foods where very small amounts can be found are rapeseed, canola, walnut, soya, flax oil, ground or crushed linseeds, flax or pumpkin seeds, soya beans or tofu, dark green leafy veg, sweet potato and whole grains and omega-3 enriched food: some eggs, milk, yogurt and yogurt drinks.
- Supplements: 1-2.7g omega-3 fish oils (EPA/DHA) daily (NOT COD LIVER OIL).
- Supplement derived from algae (good source of DHA).
- Omega-3 oil supplements are also available from health food shops and some chemists, either in liquid forms or as capsules.
- These are different from cod liver oil supplements, although some cod liver oil preparations do contain omega-3 oils – read the label to make sure.
- It's important not to confuse fish oil with fish liver oil (e.g. cod liver oil and halibut liver oil). Fish liver oils contain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids as well as vitamin D (which helps the body to absorb calcium) and vitamin A.
- But it's dangerous to take fish liver oils in the large doses recommended for arthritis because of the risk of overdosing with vitamin A.
- Some people may experience an upset stomach from taking high doses of fish oils. If this is a problem, try splitting the total dose into two or three smaller doses per day. If this doesn't work, try a lower dose, eating more oily fish or a combination of both.

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Complementary medicine

There is no scientific evidence that suggests any specific complementary medicine including supplements can ease the symptoms of Sjögren's Syndrome.

- Fasting and faddy diets which exclude certain foods are not recommended as they can deplete the body of nutrients.
- If you also suffer from other rheumatic diseases including rheumatoid arthritis, be aware there are lots of food myths surrounding diet which should not be followed.
- Some say a vegetarian or vegan diet helps, particularly in RA but again nothing is proven and instead vital nutrients like calcium and b12 are missed and issues with deficiencies are induced.

Summary

No diets or supplements will cure Sjögren's Syndrome.

A healthy balanced diet, vitamin and mineral rich provides a firm foundation for symptom control.

There are a number of dietary options to improve throat and mouth symptoms.

Adequate fibre, fluid and exercise should help relive digestive symptoms.

Omega 3 fatty acids play an essential role in improving common symptoms of Sjögren's Syndrome.

No evidence that complementary medicine can ease the symptoms of Sjögren's Syndrome.



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