



**WESTERN CAPE
ASSOCIATION FOR
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES**
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Sources & More information

Down Syndrome
South Africa
www.downsyndrome.org.za

Down Syndrome
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Western Cape
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www.downwc.co.za

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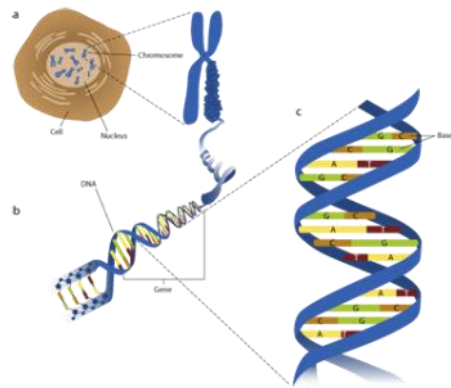
Focus on... Down Syndrome

What is Down Syndrome?

Down syndrome is a chromosomal disorder arising at the time of conception. There is an extra number 21 chromosome (Trisomy 21) which causes delays in physical and intellectual development.

What causes Down Syndrome?

The exact cause of Down syndrome is currently unknown. It is not related to race, age, religion and socio-economic status and is one of the most frequently occurring chromosomal disorders.



Down syndrome is caused by an excess of genetic material. The genetic material is present in every human body cell and is arranged in tiny structures called chromosomes. They are the building blocks which gives us our individual characteristics. They determine the colour of our hair, our eyes and many other characteristics. Screening for and diagnosis of Down syndrome is possible before birth.

Characteristics of Down Syndrome

Down syndrome is characterized by a variety of unique features and a wide range of abilities in physical and cognitive areas of development. Intellectual ability cannot be assessed by the number of clinical signs and symptoms present. The majority of people with Down syndrome fall in the mild to moderate range of intellectual disability.

Babies with Down syndrome do look slightly different to other babies and can usually be identified by certain typical features. Not all of these traits mentioned below are found in every child with Down syndrome. Like all children, children with Down syndrome do resemble their parents.

- Muscle hypotonia - low muscle tone
- Hyper flexibility - an excessive ability to extend the joints (double jointed)
- Epicanthal folds - small skin folds on the inner corner of the eyes.
- Flat facial profile - somewhat depressed nasal bridge and a small nose.
- The hands tend to be broad with short fingers.
- Simian line - a single crease on the palm of the

hand. The small finger may tend to curve inward.

- A wide space between the first and second toes (sandal gap)
- Short stature
- Congenital heart defects in 40 - 50% of people with Down syndrome.
- 8 - 12 % have gastrointestinal tract abnormalities present at birth. Most of these defects are now correctable by surgery.
- Hearing may be affected in up to 65% of people with Down syndrome. It is advisable to have children's ears tested at least every six months.
- Vision problems occur in 50 % of people with Down syndrome. It is advisable to take your child for an eye test every second year.

How common is Down Syndrome?

The incidence of Down syndrome is estimated to be one in every 1000 live births in developed countries and one in every 650 live births in developing countries. Women over the age of 35 are at a higher risk of having a child with Down syndrome. Nevertheless more than 80% of children with Down Syndrome are currently being born to mothers under the age of 35.

Can Down Syndrome be cured?

Although it cannot be cured, people with Down syndrome benefit from loving homes, appropriate medical care, early intervention, educational and vocational services. Due to advanced medical care, the majority of people born with Down syndrome today have a life expectancy of approximately fifty-five years, and lead healthy and productive lives.

Interaction with a person with Down syndrome

The person with Down syndrome has the same emotions and needs as any other person and deserves the same opportunities and care. The proper and accepted terminology for this disability is DOWN SYNDROME.

