

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. 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.

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.



Symptoms

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 & small finger 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 at birth, mostly correctable by surgery.
- Hearing may be affected in up to 65% of people with Down syndrome.
- Vision problems occur in 50 % of people with Down syndrome.

What does it mean for the individual?

Down syndrome is characterised 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. 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.

Individuals with Down Syndrome are able to lead full and productive lives. They have the same emotions and needs as any other person and deserves the same opportunities and care.

