



FACTS about Down syndrome

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- Down syndrome occurs when an individual has three, rather than two, copies of the 21st chromosome. This additional genetic material alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with Down syndrome.
- Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring chromosomal condition; one in every 691 babies in the United States is born with Down syndrome.
- Down syndrome occurs in people of all races and economic levels.
- The incidence of births of children with Down syndrome increases with the age of the mother, but due to higher fertility rates in younger women, 80% of children with Down syndrome are born to women under 35 years of age.
- People with Down syndrome have an increased risk for congenital heart defects, gastrointestinal defects, leukemia, thyroid conditions, frequent ear infections, hearing loss, obesity, vision problems, osteoarthritis, celiac disease, obstructive sleep apnea, and atlantoaxial instability (which increases the risk of injury from spinal cord injuries). Many of these conditions are treatable; therefore, most people with Down syndrome lead healthy and productive lives. Older individuals with Down syndrome also experience premature aging which increases their risk for an Alzheimer's type dementia. However, for many aging adults with Down syndrome, this is not an inevitable diagnosis.
- A few of the common physical traits of Down syndrome are low muscle tone, small stature, almond shaped eyes, and a single deep crease across the center of the palm. Every person with Down syndrome is a unique individual and may possess these characteristics to different degrees, or not at all.
- Life expectancy for people with Down syndrome has increased dramatically in recent decades – from 25 in 1983 to 60 today, with many people living into their 70s.
- People with Down syndrome attend school (including college), go to work, get married, and contribute to society in many ways.
- All people with Down syndrome experience cognitive delays, but the effect is usually mild to moderate and is not indicative of the many strengths and talents that each individual possesses. Also, like autism, Down syndrome is like a spectrum....each person comes with different abilities.
- Quality educational programs, a stimulating home environment, good healthcare, and positive support from family, friends, and the community enables people with Down syndrome to realize their life aspirations and lead fulfilling lives.