

Down Syndrome Fact Sheet

Down syndrome occurs when an individual has a full or partial extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional genetic material alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with Down syndrome.

There are three types of Down syndrome: trisomy 21 (nondisjunction) accounts for 95% of cases, translocation accounts for about 4% and mosaicism accounts for about 1%.

Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring chromosomal condition. One in every 691 babies in the United States is born with Down syndrome.

There are more than 400,000 people living with Down syndrome in the United States.

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 certain medical conditions such as congenital heart defects, respiratory and hearing problems, Alzheimer's disease, childhood leukemia, and thyroid conditions. Many of these conditions are now treatable, so most people with Down syndrome lead healthy lives.

A few of the common physical traits of Down syndrome are low muscle tone, small stature, an upward slant to the 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.

People with Down syndrome attend school, work, participate in decisions that affect them, and contribute to society in many wonderful 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.

Quality educational programs, a stimulating home environment, good health care, and positive support from family, friends and the community enable people with Down syndrome to develop their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

Down syndrome is a common genetic variation which usually causes delay in physical, intellectual and language development.

The exact causes of the chromosomal rearrangement and primary prevention of Down syndrome are currently unknown.

Down syndrome is one of the leading clinical causes of cognitive delay in the world – it is not related to race, nationality, religion or socio-economic status.

The incidence of Down syndrome in the United States is estimated to be 1 in every 700 live births.

Of all children born in this country annually, approximately 5,000 will have Down syndrome.

There are approximately 1/4 million families in the United States affected by Down syndrome.

While the likelihood of giving birth to a child with Down syndrome increases with maternal age; nevertheless, 80% of babies with Down syndrome are born to women under 35 years of age, as women in that age group give birth to more babies overall.

There is wide variation in mental abilities, behavior and physical development in individuals with Down syndrome. Each individual has his/her own unique personality, capabilities and talents.

30% – 50% of the individuals with Down syndrome have heart defects and 8% – 12% have gastrointestinal tract abnormalities present at birth. Most of these defects are now correctable by surgery.

Individuals with Down syndrome benefit from loving homes, early intervention, inclusive education, appropriate medical care and positive public attitudes.

In adulthood, many persons with Down syndrome hold jobs, live independently and enjoy recreational opportunities in their communities.

Nothing that a parent did or did not do during pregnancy causes Down syndrome.

The chance of having a baby with Down syndrome increases as a woman gets older – from 1 in 1250 for a woman who gets pregnant at age 25 to about 1 in 100 for a woman who gets pregnant at age 40.

While the age of the mother can be a factor, 80% of people with Down syndrome are born to parents under the age of 35 because more younger women have babies.

Down syndrome occurs in both boys and girls and all races and economic levels.