

# Down Syndrome

## Fact Sheet

### What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is the most common and readily identifiable chromosomal condition associated with mental retardation. For no known reason, an accident in cell development results in 47 rather than the usual 46 chromosomes, thus changing the orderly development of the body and brain.

### How Common is Down syndrome?

- Approximately 4,000 children in the U.S. are born with Down syndrome each year, or one in every 800 births.
- The incidence of Down syndrome is higher in women over age 35.
- Most common forms of the syndrome do not usually occur more than once in a family.

### Characteristics of Down syndrome

There are over 50 clinical signs of Down syndrome, however, it is rare to find all or even most in one person. Some common characteristics include:

- Poor muscle tone
- Slanting eyes with folds of skin at the inner eyes
- Hyperflexibility of joints
- Short, broad hands with a single crease across the palm on one or both hands
- Broad feet with short toes
- Flat bridge of the nose
- Low set ears
- Short neck
- Small head
- Small oral cavity and/or short, high pitched cries in infancy

### Is There a Cure?

Currently, there is no cure for Down syndrome. However, researchers have identified the genes that cause the characteristics of Down syndrome and are working to enhance their basic understanding of Down syndrome and facilitate the development of effective interventions and treatment strategies.

### Educational Implications

Research has shown that stimulation and encouragement during early developmental stages improves the child's chances of developing to his or her fullest potential. For children with Down syndrome, the most effective treatments are early intervention programs. These programs offer parents special instruction in teaching their child language, cognitive, self-help, and social skills, and specific exercises for gross and fine motor development.

Just as in the normal population, there is a wide variation in mental abilities, behavior, and developmental progress in individuals with Down syndrome. Their level of retardation may range from mild to severe, with the majority functioning in the mild to moderate range. Due to these individual differences, it is impossible to predict future achievements of children with Down syndrome. And because of the range of ability in children with Down syndrome, it is important for families and all members of the school's education team to place few limitations on potential capabilities.

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