



Understanding Down Syndrome: A Guide for Families

What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is a condition in which a person has an extra chromosome. Chromosomes are small “packages” of genes in the body. Usually, a baby is born with 46 chromosomes (or 23 pairs). Babies with Down syndrome have an extra copy of the 21st chromosome, resulting in three copies of the chromosome. The medical term for having an extra copy of a chromosome is ‘Trisomy.’

How common is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is one of the most common genetic disorders. Each year about 6,000 babies born in the United States have Down syndrome. This means that it occurs in about 1 in 800 to 1,000 live born children.

How did my baby get Down syndrome?

Having an extra copy of the 21st chromosome is not related to anything the mother or father did during pregnancy. Researchers do not know what causes the extra copy, however women who are 35 years or older when they become pregnant are more likely to have a pregnancy affected by Down syndrome than women who become pregnant at a younger age.

What does this mean for my baby?

The extra copy of the 21st chromosome changes how the baby’s body and brain develop, which can cause both mental and physical challenges for the baby. Even though people with Down syndrome might act and look similar, each person has different abilities. People with Down syndrome usually have an IQ (measure of intelligence) in the mild to moderately delayed range. Children with Down syndrome usually are smaller than other children. Language, motor, and intellectual development are generally delayed in children with Down syndrome.

Will my child get better?

Developmental milestones vary widely in children with Down syndrome and are impossible to predict. Early intervention services including physical, occupational, and speech therapies should be started early in life to optimize a child’s development. Inclusion in regular classrooms provides an opportunity for children to engage in sharing relationships with others and develop academic skills. In adulthood, many people with Down syndrome hold jobs, live independently, and enjoy community life.



RESOURCES

**Down Syndrome
Association of Los Angeles**

dsala.org
(818) 786-0001

**National Down Syndrome
Society**

ndss.org
(800) 221-4602

**National Down Syndrome
Congress**

ndscenter.org
(800) 232-6372

**Club 21 Learning and Resource Center
for Individuals with Down Syndrome**

clubtwentyone.org
(626) 844-1821

For additional information, you may also contact
WRC's Staff Psychologist Kaely Shilakes, Psy.D
who can be reached at (310) 258-4157.



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REGIONAL CENTER

5901 Green Valley Circle, Suite 320 Culver City, CA 90230
www.westsiderc.org / (310) 258-4000