

Down syndrome is a naturally occurring chromosomal arrangement that has always existed and is universal across racial, gender and socio-economic lines.

One in every 800 babies has Down syndrome.

A person with Down syndrome has three copies of the 21st chromosome instead of two. The effects of this extra genetic material vary from person to person.

Down syndrome was named after John Langdon Down. Down syndrome is referred to as Down syndrome, not Down's syndrome. Unlike Lou Gehrig's disease (also known as ALS), John Langdon Down did not have Down syndrome – therefore it is not possessive, as in Down's.

People with Down syndrome often share some physical features, but this varies greatly between individuals. Individuals with Down syndrome will look like their family members and will have their own unique personality.

Although the chance of Down syndrome increases with maternal age, 80 per cent of children with Down syndrome are born to women younger than 35 years old. This is because younger women of childbearing age are more likely to have children than older women.

Down syndrome is not a disease, disorder or medical condition. It is wrong to refer to people with Down syndrome as "afflicted with" or "suffering from" it.

A popular generalization is associating people with Down syndrome as always loving, smiling, or happy. People with Down syndrome are not all alike - the diversity of personalities is similar to that of the general population.



Celebrate Being
About Down Syndrome



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Civitan Foundation of Canada

Canada's national voice for
individuals with Down syndrome



Health Issues

Individuals with Down syndrome may have a greater incidence of certain health complications than the average person.

However, having Down syndrome does not guarantee the development of any particular health concern. Forty per cent of children with Down syndrome are born with a heart defect. Many of these heart defects repair on their own, while some do require surgery to correct the problem.

Babies with Down syndrome often have stomach and bowel problems. These usually appear right after birth and can be corrected surgically. Thyroid, vision and hearing problems are common in individuals with Down syndrome and are best treated if detected early. Appropriate medical care with proper detection and treatment for health concerns ensures the continued health for individuals with Down syndrome.

A little known fact is that having Down syndrome actually lessens a person's chances of developing certain illnesses or health complications, including many cancers. Ongoing research is investigating how this occurs. Again, there is no guarantee that these will not occur and preventative measures, early detection screenings and healthy lifestyles are still recommended.



Education and Learning

Down syndrome commonly results in an effect on learning style, although the differences are highly variable, just as physical characteristics or health concerns.

With assistance opportunities exist for effective methods of teaching each individual.

People with Down syndrome learn differently, but they do learn. As we find out more about how they learn and the best methods for teaching to their strengths, individuals with Down syndrome will likely learn more, faster and more efficiently.

The Canadian Down Syndrome Society believes quality inclusion is the best model for educating students with Down syndrome. Students with Down syndrome have the right to life-enhancing education experiences, which all children deserve. Diversity in the classroom enhances the learning, lives and citizenship of all students. Children with Down syndrome benefit from the experiences of learning with their peers in inclusive educational settings.



The Future

The Down syndrome community in Canada and the CDSS have made great strides since our founding in 1987.

We have seen advances in access to medical care, which enhance and save the lives of people with Down syndrome; life expectancy has more than doubled. Many people with Down syndrome live well into their 50s and 60s.

We have seen the benefits of early intervention programs, inclusion in school and work and the development of accessible resources for people with Down syndrome, families and the community.

Today, individuals with Down syndrome are going to post-secondary schools, working and getting married. People with Down syndrome are now given the opportunity to be fully contributing members of society.

Despite the great advances made, much more needs to be done. We need to ensure the inclusion of individuals with Down syndrome in their schools, communities and workplaces. Your support of the Canadian Down Syndrome Society will ensure this continues and allow us to speak for the 35,000 Canadians with Down syndrome.

