

Down Syndrome (Trisomy 21)

Chromosome Conditions

Down syndrome is a chromosome condition. Chromosomes are structures that hold our genetic information; the information that tells our bodies how to grow and function. As humans, we typically have a total of 46 chromosomes, or 23 pairs: one set inherited from our mother through the egg and one from our father through the sperm.



Chromosome conditions refer to situations where a baby has extra or missing chromosomes. These conditions usually do not run in families. There is nothing you can do to cause or prevent a chromosome condition. For many of these conditions, the chance increases with the age of the mother, but there are babies born with chromosome conditions to

mothers of all ages. Pregnancies where the baby has a chromosome condition have a higher risk for miscarriage. Down syndrome, also known as trisomy 21, is caused by having an extra copy of the 21st chromosome.

Characteristics of Down Syndrome

- Prenatal ultrasound may show signs of health concerns when a baby has Down syndrome, but not always.
- Individuals with Down syndrome have some degree of intellectual disability that can range from mild to severe.



- They also have developmental delays and benefit from early intervention.
- Some babies with Down syndrome are born with birth defects, such as heart problems or abnormalities of the digestive system, that may require treatment after birth.



- Many individuals with Down syndrome participate in their schools and communities, and have friends and intimate relationships.
- As adults, people with Down syndrome may work and live semi-independently or independently.
- In the United States, life expectancy for an individual with Down syndrome is about 60 years.

You can find more information and videos about prenatal genetic testing options at: www.doh.wa.gov and www.geneticsupportfoundation.org.

OTHER RESOURCES:

- “Understanding a Down Syndrome Diagnosis” (lettercase.org): A booklet for patients first learning about a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome.
- National Center for Prenatal and Postnatal Down Syndrome Resources downsyndromediagnosis.org
- Down Syndrome Pregnancy (downsyndromepregnancy.org): A book and website with detailed information for new and expectant parents anticipating the birth of a child with Down syndrome.
- Brighter Tomorrows (brightertomorrows.org): A website for both new and expectant parents.
- Babies with Down Syndrome, Edited by Susan J. Skallerup (woodbinehouse.com): An extensive book for new parents.

