

FAQ: Down Syndrome

What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is a genetic diagnosis that causes delays in physical and intellectual development. Individuals with Down syndrome have 47 chromosomes instead of the usual 46. Down syndrome is not related to race, nationality, religion or socioeconomic status. The spectrum of impact on individuals' intellectual abilities is broad.

What causes Down syndrome?

Down syndrome occurs when an individual has three (rather than two) copies of the 21st chromosome. This additional genetic material alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with Down syndrome. This is a genetic disorder with no known cause.

What are the signs of Down syndrome?

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. All people with Down syndrome experience cognitive delays, the effect is usually mild to moderate.

How is Down syndrome diagnosed?

Down syndrome is usually identified at birth or shortly thereafter. Initially the diagnosis is based on physical characteristics seen as a baby. The diagnosis must be confirmed by a chromosome study called a karyotype. A karyotype provides a visual display of the chromosomes grouped by their size, number and shape. Chromosomes may be studied by examining blood or tissue cells.

How common is Down syndrome?

- Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring chromosomal condition. One in every 722 babies is born with Down syndrome, about 4000 individuals each year.
- There are more than 400,000 people with Down syndrome living in the United States.
- Down syndrome occurs in people of all races and economic levels.

What services does Fraser provide related to Down syndrome?

Fraser provides a variety of services for children and adults with Down syndrome.

- A family may begin with an evaluation or intake to determine appropriate services or monitor a child's progress.
- A family may enroll their infant, toddler or preschooler in Fraser School®, an inclusive early childhood center serving children 6 weeks to 6 years of age.
- Fraser Rehabilitation Services include occupational therapy (to improve fine and gross motor skills); speech-language therapy (to improve language and communication skills); physical therapy (to improve mobility, strength, and coordination); music therapy (to improve academic, social, emotional, communication and physical skills); and feeding therapy (to manage eating or oral challenges).
- Flexible Case Management services help families access services and support.
- Fraser Residential and Home and Community Supports Services provide safe and caring residential homes and independent living apartments.

These tips were compiled from a variety of sources including National Down syndrome Society www.ndss.org, National Association for Down syndrome www.nads.org and Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota www.dsamn.org. For more tip sheets, visit www.fraser.org.