

Down Syndrome

Each October we recognize and celebrate Down Syndrome Awareness Month to move toward a more informed and inclusive public. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Down Syndrome is the most common chromosomal condition in the United States with 1 in every 600 babies having the lifelong condition in 2021. Although there are 3 types of Down Syndrome, the most common is 'Trisomy 21' (meaning a replication of chromosome 21). Those who have Down Syndrome have identifying characteristics including distinguishing facial features, small stature and shortened limbs. They often have coexisting conditions such as delays in development and other medical conditions.

Jon Langdon Down, a nineteenth century English physician, discovered Down Syndrome and, thereafter, the condition was associated with his name in 1862. Since the time of discovery, many advances have been made in the science and investigation of DNA and genes. These strides in research have led to an increased life expectancy in many with Down Syndrome. Proactive diagnosis and treatment of known coexisting medical conditions associated with the syndrome include various cardiac issues, vision problems, hearing loss, infertility, and gastrointestinal issues.

People with Down Syndrome participate in daily living activities and appreciate being accepted in society. Organizations such as the National Association for Down Syndrome (NADS), National Down Syndrome Society (NDS), Down Syndrome Resource Foundation (DSRF), Global Down Syndrome Foundation and the Special Olympics recognize the value and contribution by celebrating their diversity and skill. Many individuals with Down Syndrome have been recognized for accomplishments in athletic events and have more recently been known to join the modeling industry.

Parents of children with Down Syndrome want others to teach their children inclusion and not use harsh, derogatory terms. As previously noted, children with Down Syndrome learn at a slower pace than other children, but tend to enjoy similar age-related activities that other children enjoy. Understanding that many of these children have encountered medical conditions, surgeries, and struggles with development helps to educate other children to better interact with their classmate. However, these realities do not mean that children with Down Syndrome require or anticipate any kind of recognition for all they encounter, they simply only want to be included and respected.

In conclusion, it is best to focus on what any person can do rather than what they cannot. Individuals with Down Syndrome want the same opportunities as other individuals and can excel in many professions and athletics.

As the Meigs County Health Department's Children with Medical Handicaps (CMH) Public Health Nurse, I appreciate the individuality of each child and family I serve. The CMH program not only assists with medical costs, but also offers local service coordination to guide families toward available resources. If you or a loved one have a new or previous medical diagnosis that you may be struggling with, please contact me at (740) 992-6626.

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