

# Down Syndrome

## What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is a disorder that people are born with. People with Down syndrome may have some characteristic physical features, some health and developmental challenges and some level of intellectual disability.

There is no explanation as to why it happens, it occurs in all ethnic and social groups and to children whose parents are of all ages. It is nobody's fault. There is no cure and it does not go away.

It is typically associated with physical growth delays, characteristic facial features, and mild-moderate intellectual and learning difficulties.

Screening can identify Down syndrome during pregnancy.

Having Down syndrome will not be the most important influence on how that person develops and lives their life. This will depend on family, environmental, social and cultural factors.

## Personal limitations of having Down syndrome

### Cognition skills

Everyone who has Down syndrome will have some level of intellectual disability. This means that their physical or mental growth may be slower and some level of learning difficulty.



### Physical skills

Gross motor skills are those concerned with whole body movement including sitting, walking, running and climbing stairs. Children with Down syndrome learn to walk later than other children. Walking may begin around the age of 2; some children may not learn how to walk until the age of 4.

### Communication skills

For many people with Down syndrome, speaking clearly can be difficult. Although a lot of people with Down syndrome speak fluently and clearly, many will need help such as speech and language therapy to achieve this. Very often, people with Down syndrome can understand a lot more than they can express with words; this often means that their abilities are underestimated, which can make them feel frustrated.



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Some people with Down syndrome will find it very difficult to develop language skills and speak clearly. This may be made worse by hearing loss.

Many people with Down syndrome are likely to need some level of support to help them achieve the kind of life that most people take for granted.

## Variability in severity of features of the syndrome

Each person is unique, and the same goes for people with Down syndrome. Each person will have different strengths and weaknesses. Some of those with Down syndrome may have hearing loss and other associated medical difficulties.

## Personal Strengths of having Down syndrome

People with Down syndrome may have some of these personal strengths:

- Great with social interaction
- Excellent non-verbal communication (i.e. pointing, body language, and facial expression)

## What is a speech therapist's role in Down syndrome?

Individuals with Down syndrome differ considerably in their language and communication skills. Early communication intervention fosters linguistic skills. Individualized speech therapy can target specific speech errors, increase speech intelligibility, and in some cases encourage advanced language and literacy.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) methods, such as pointing, body language, objects, or graphics are often used to aid communication. Speech therapists will focus on

speech, vocabulary, grammar and communication skills and can give support on working memory.

## Speech therapists can also provide:

- Vocabulary development
- Cognitive-linguistic development (i.e. how they understand, think about and produce language)
- Social development (i.e. explain how they feel, describe what they are doing and share thoughts and worries with friends)
- Improve clarity in speech
- Key Word Sign
- Reading
- Parent/carer education and training (so that therapy can continue into later life)
- Grammar
- Review oral-motor function,
- Assess and advise on feeding, chewing and drinking patterns

## For more information on speech pathology, visit the Trinh Foundation website:

<http://trinhfoundation.org>

Contact details for Vietnamese trained speech therapist are provided on the Trinh Foundation Australia website