

Down syndrome

Myth: Down syndrome is a rare genetic disorder.

Truth: Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring genetic condition. One in every 733 live births is a child with Down syndrome, representing approximately 5,000 births per year in the United States alone. Today, more than 400,000 people in the United States have Down syndrome. Down syndrome occurs when an individual has three, rather than two, copies of the 21st chromosome which alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with Down syndrome.

Myth: People with Down syndrome have a short life span.

Truth: Life expectancy for individuals with Down syndrome has increased dramatically in recent decades – from 25 in 1983 to 60 today.

Myth: Most children with Down syndrome are born to older parents.

Truth: Most children with Down syndrome are born to women younger than 35-years-old simply because younger women have more children. However, the incidence of births of children with Down syndrome increases with the age of the mother. A 35-year-old woman has about a one in 400 chance of conceiving a child with Down syndrome, and this chance increases gradually to one in 110 by age 40. At age 45, the incidence becomes approximately one in 35.

Myth: People with Down syndrome are severely “retarded.”

Truth: Most people with Down syndrome have IQs that fall in the mild to moderate range of intellectual disability (formerly known as “retardation”). Children with Down syndrome fully participate in public and private educational programs. Educators and researchers are still discovering the full educational potential of people with Down syndrome.

Myth: Most people with Down syndrome are institutionalized.

Truth: Today people with Down syndrome live at home with their families and are active participants in the educational, vocational, social, and recreational activities of the community. They are integrated into the regular education system and take part in sports, camping, music, art programs and all the other activities of their communities. People with Down syndrome are valued members of their families and their communities, contributing to society in a variety of ways.

Myth: Parents will not find community support in bringing up their child with Down syndrome.

Truth: In almost every community of the United States there are parent support groups and other community organizations directly involved in providing services to families of individuals with Down syndrome.

Myth: Children with Down syndrome must be placed in segregated special education programs.

Truth: Children with Down syndrome have been included in regular academic classrooms in schools across the country. In some instances they are integrated into specific courses, while in other situations students are fully included in the regular classroom for all subjects. The current trend in education is for full inclusion in the social and educational life of the community. Increasingly, individuals with Down syndrome graduate from high school with regular diplomas, participate in post-secondary academic and college experiences and, in some cases, receive college degrees.

Myth: Adults with Down syndrome are unemployable.

Truth: Businesses are seeking young adults with Down syndrome for a variety of positions. They are

being employed in small- and medium-sized offices: by banks, corporations, nursing homes, hotels and restaurants. They work in the music and entertainment industry, in clerical positions, childcare, the sports field and in the computer industry. People with Down syndrome bring to their jobs enthusiasm, reliability and dedication.

Myth: People with Down syndrome are always happy.

Truth: People with Down syndrome have feelings just like everyone else in the population. They experience the full range of emotions. They respond to positive expressions of friendship and they are hurt and upset by inconsiderate behavior.

Myth: Adults with Down syndrome are unable to form close interpersonal relationships leading to marriage.

Truth: People with Down syndrome date, socialize, form ongoing relationships and marry.

Myth: Down syndrome can never be cured.

Truth: Research on Down syndrome is making great strides in identifying the genes on chromosome 21 that cause the characteristics of Down syndrome. Scientists now feel strongly that it will be possible to improve, correct or prevent many of the problems associated with Down syndrome in the future