



Down Syndrome
Australia

Building a partnership with a general practitioner

This fact sheet has been designed for people with Down syndrome and their families to provide information about building a relationship with a GP and outlines what some of the important considerations are. This tip sheet has been developed in consultation with people with Down syndrome, their families and health professionals.

As with all people, it is important for people with Down syndrome and their families to build a strong, lasting relationship with a General Practitioner (GP) for the person's health and wellbeing.

A useful way to think about working with a GP is to see the GP as part of the team aiming to provide the best possible care to the person with Down syndrome.

A good GP for a person with Down syndrome and their family:

- shows respect to the person with Down syndrome and their family
- provides information, advice and support as required
- communicates directly with the person with Down syndrome in words they can understand and listens actively



- takes time to answer questions
- understands disability and Down syndrome
- is responsive to your needs
- is proactive in your treatment
- refers to appropriate specialists when required.

Information, advice and support

The role of a GPs is to provide information and advice on a broad range of health areas. Some helpful tips to ensure you get the most from the time with the GP are:

- Bring a list of questions or key issues to discuss to the consultation.
- Bring a list of medications that you are currently taking.
- Take notes during the appointment.
- Bring someone along to help.
- Ask the GP to print out information for you to take home.

Communication

When you meet with your GP you should be able to ask questions and raise any issues you are worried about. The GP should speak in a way that the person with Down syndrome understands. Some people with Down syndrome may have difficulty in verbal communication but do understand what the GP is saying.

How to support a person with Down syndrome at an appointment:

- Talk to the person with Down syndrome before the appointment and write down any questions or things they want to talk about and make sure these are discussed with the GP.
- If the GP does not speak directly to the person with Down syndrome, let him/her know that this is not acceptable and that the person with Down syndrome needs to be part of the conversation.
- Ensure that the GP is aware of the person with Down syndrome's level of understanding and work with the GP to make sure they are explaining things in a way that the person with Down syndrome can understand.

Referrals

GPs will know when to refer a person on to a specialist. Most GPs refer to a range of specialists they use regularly and have close contact with.

Helpful hints:

- You can ask the GP for a referral to a specialist that you know of or have seen before.
- You may want to ask other families about their experiences with different specialists to find one that will meet your needs.
- You can ask the GP for an indefinite referral. An indefinite referral is not limited to one year and therefore if it is a specialist that will be providing ongoing care then there won't be the need to get a new referral every 12 months.

Some other helpful tips that can help build a strong relationship with a GP are:

- Make the appointments at a time that is going to work best for the person with Down syndrome.
- Be on time. GPs are busy people and many practices have short appointment times, so being on time will mean you get the most out of the appointment. If you need a longer appointment, then ask for a longer consultation when you book the appointment.

- Remember to take any relevant pathology reports, specialist reports list of medications, and so on.
- It can be difficult to remember your own/the person's medical history so it can be helpful to put all relevant medical papers into a file to take with you to appointments.
- Be prepared to look around until you find a GP who meets your needs and don't be afraid to change GPs if your needs aren't being met.
- Make sure your GP understands your cultural/language needs. There are many GPs and their staff who speak different languages and understand different cultures. Contact the Australian Medical Association in your state or territory for information about GPs who may be able to help.

Where can I go for more information:

Down syndrome association contact details

There is a Down syndrome association in each state and territory. You can contact these associations for support and advice. We are here to help you. Our associations are made up of a wide range of parents, professionals and people with Down syndrome who work or volunteer with us. Please visit our website at www.downsyndrome.org.au or call 1300 881 935 to be automatically connected to your closest association.