



Myths & Facts about Down Syndrome



“Awareness” is more than just understanding that something exists. It’s about learning the truths behind a condition, rather than believing the common misconceptions that are often told and shared. In that vein, we’ve created some fun facts about Down Syndrome, supported by research where possible.

So many parents have been convinced of many myths and outdated ideas about Down Syndrome. Wife, mother of 3, Health Manager and Blogger **Amelia Burfitt** shares a couple of common myths you may have heard!

Myth 1: Parents are more likely to divorce if they have a Child with Down Syndrome

Divorce rates are actually lower in families of children with Down syndrome, as found in a recent study. A large study (one of the largest to date!) done in 2008, by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and published by the American Association of Intellectual Disabilities found that divorce rates are lower in families of children with Down syndrome than in the group that had non-disabled children.

So many people have been told their relationship will suffer if they were to go ahead with a pregnancy. Many people assume that given the challenges that may come, this is what will happen to their marriage or relationship if they have a child with Down Syndrome. What great news for couples facing this unexpected news in their path to becoming parents.

Myth 2: Children with Down Syndrome are only born to older parents

The majority (around 80%) of children with Down syndrome are born to women younger than 35.

The average age of women in Australia giving birth is around 30 years of age. So it makes sense most babies with Down Syndrome are born to younger mothers, because that's when most people are having children!

However, the likelihood of having a child with Down Syndrome years does gradually increase to a small extent with the age of the mother after the age of 35.

Whilst we're here - Down Syndrome has nothing to do with what the parents did, or did not do. It is a total random episode that occurs at conception!



Myth 3: People with Down Syndrome cannot form relationships

People with Down syndrome are perfectly capable of forming all types of relationships (and experiencing all types of emotion) with people they encounter in their lives; be it friendship, love or enemies. You may be surprised to know that many adults with Down Syndrome are in relationships, and it's becoming more common for them to get married.

Most adults want to find love and companionship. People with Down Syndrome are no different. They feel the full range of emotions that anyone else feels. They definitely experience affection and love, and many express desire to find a partner and settle down.

Why should they be condemned to a life of being single, because they have Down Syndrome, if that is not what they wish?

This is more than just what many see as a 'cute gesture between kids'. Adults with Down Syndrome have every right to dating, marriage, housing, employment, education, and pretty much anything everyone else is entitled to about the future.

It is well known in the non-disabled population that partnership and marriage have lasting benefits; leads to greater longevity, learning and improved memory, greater motivation,

improved status and improved self-image. People with Down Syndrome are entitled to these positive outcomes, and perhaps even more so.

Loneliness is very typical and a difficult experience for a lot of adults with disabilities. They have to work harder to live an ordinary life, and having a relationship can help by leaning on each others strengths.

We need to move towards viewing them as not just as adults with intellectual disabilities but as; people, individuals and as adults. It may come with certain hurdles. But if it means they need a little bit more support to make it happen, then we should give it to them. They should define their own lives.

If you google 'couples with down syndrome' you will read many, many success stories of those making it work. [Here is one on Instagram you might like to check out: Maryanne & Tommy.](#)

Myth 4: People with Down Syndrome cannot learn to read or write

The majority of children with Down Syndrome can learn to read and write. Teachers who are well trained and have high expectations of their students have shown to have the best success. The more we expect, the more we will achieve.

Our kids with Down Syndrome often learn in different conditions to typical kids (visual, sensory, via singing games etc). Historically we haven't given them much of an education at all, so it's no surprise that the outcome was they couldn't read or write.

Before the 1980s, the overwhelming majority of people with Down syndrome were placed in institutions, often times as infants or young children. Because of neglect, abuse, and lack of access to education and medical care, people with Down syndrome would die an early death in these institutions and it was not blamed on institutionalisation, it was simply Down Syndrome.

During this time most professionals considered it impossible for people with Down syndrome to learn how to speak properly, let alone read and write. They were not allowed to attend public schools and most people believed they should not be allowed in public spaces such as movie theatres, shopping centres or parks.

Fast forward and now, people with Down syndrome now live at home (versus an institution). Their IQs have increased 20 points and the overwhelming majority will learn how to read and



write. Most are attending school and some are graduating with a typical degree. There are a handful who have gone on to achieve college degrees. More and more are holding down jobs.

The more we expect, the more we will achieve.

[Information sourced from Global Down Syndrome Foundation](#)

Myth 5: People with Down Syndrome can't attend public schools

It is not only advisable that children with Down Syndrome attend regular schools, it is required by law that it be available to them. [If you want to check out the research, its overwhelming positive.](#) For both disabled AND non disabled students. Studies show that including students in the classroom with disabilities improves academic progress of their non- disabled peers.

Children with Down Syndrome are the greatest teachers of virtue. If you send someone away, or you don't take it upon yourself to nurture a child in your school environment - you have not only missed the greatest opportunity for that particular child - but also an opportunity to teach virtues to all the other children at that school who would have experienced immense intangible benefits.

Some children with Down Syndrome go to regular schools, and some go to special needs schools. Which, should be decided because of the needs of the child, not the needs of the school or any opinions others may have.

Myth 6: A child with Down syndrome will negatively impact their siblings

[A recent study published in the Journal of Intellectual Disability Research](#) found no significant differences between the siblings of the children with Down syndrome and the comparison siblings on the measures of behaviour or competence. They also found no differences in the children's own reports of their relationships with friends or with academic performance.

In fact, mental health professionals point to the psychological advantages - they have documented siblings who have increased tolerance, compassion and awareness, in contrast to all typical siblings. That's a pretty amazing benefit if you ask me!



Myth 7: People with Down Syndrome cannot have children

People with Down Syndrome can have children. Women more easily than men, yet both appear to have lower fertility. However it is not impossible as there are cited cases of BOTH throughout the world.

The information about fertility in people with Down Syndrome is very outdated and based on research in institutions where men and women with intellectual disabilities were kept apart.

Have you read about the gorgeous story of the Syrian man whose father has Down Syndrome?

He talks so lovingly about how his father has inspired him, as well as worked incredibly hard to provide him with a good life. He, the son, does not have Down Syndrome and is now studying to be a Dentist.

Myth 8: All people with Down Syndrome will develop Alzheimer's disease (dementia)



Believe it or not, the gene responsible for dementia is actually located in the 21st chromosome! As people with Down Syndrome have a 3rd copy of the 21st chromosome they have 1.5 times the gene, making it more likely.

However! Not all people with Down Syndrome develop Alzheimer's. One study shows the number to be between 20-55% will develop the disease before the age of 50. 100% carry plaques and tangles in the brain associated with the disease because the gene responsible for dementia is located in the 21st chromosome.

How many people with Down syndrome will actually develop symptomatic Alzheimer's disease needs additional research as the most recent study was done in 1989, 31 years ago.

More importantly – how cool is it that people with Down Syndrome are now living longer and longer in order to find out!! Who knows - considering the strong link with the extra chromosome, maybe someone with Down Syndrome will be the key to fully understanding Alzheimer's for all the population one day.

Myth 9: Your life will never be the same

Just like having any baby, no your life will not be the same! It will be wonderful, full of love joy and purpose.

Everyone's life changes with each baby that comes along. There is no easy path to parenthood. Like many challenges we face, parenting helps you to come out stronger, resilient, softer and more refined.

Having a child with Down Syndrome will upturn all your ideas about joy and help you to focus on what's truly important. Just like when you have any new baby, your life will never be the same, you will never be the same. Only better.



[You can visit Amelia's website here: For Want of Wonder | Life with trisomy 21](#)

If you are needing additional support, advice or in-school sessions, reach out to Down Syndrome NSW. We offer expert information, resources, behaviour support, inclusion workshops, school consultations and training.



Down Syndrome
New South Wales

 02 9841 4444
 dsansw.org.au
 admin@dsansw.org.au



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