

What is Down Syndrome?

There are many children in Tonga with Down Syndrome. This is caused by an extra chromosome in one of the cells when a baby is formed. It is not because the mother or father have a different number of cells, but just because of an accident that happens when the cells come together.

There is a higher percentage **chance** that mothers aged over 35 will have a baby with down syndrome, but this chance is not 100%. It doesn't matter the age of the father.



These babies and children look different from others of the same age and may have:

- Round, flat faces with small mouths (which can lead to the tongue sticking out)
- Slanting eyes
- Floppy weak bodies
- Rounded hands with one crease on the palms of the hands
- Flexible limbs – weak muscles, loose joints and slower reflexes
- Short squat bodies



Babies and children with down syndrome may learn new things slowly.

You will have to encourage them to learn the things that your other children learn naturally, like:

- crawling,
- walking,
- running and
- especially talking.

The best way to help children and babies with down syndrome learn is:

- start teaching your child now! play games to help them sit up, crawl, stand up, walk, run, jump, use their hands to pick up big and small things, talking and singing games, naming and pointing to different parts of their body and to use words to tell you when they need the toilet or are hungry.
- practice these things every day, over and over again!!



Sometimes they also have problems with:

- **Breastfeeding** – this might be difficult because of weak muscles in the mouth – you might have to help your baby by massaging its lips and cheeks before feeding and maybe holding its lips onto the nipple.
- **Chest infections** – because of weak muscles in the stomach it can be hard for you baby to cough up things that get into its lungs which can lead to infections – take your baby to the doctor straight away if you think it's getting a flu.
- **The heart** – if the child gets tired or goes a greyish colour around the nose and mouth when he/she runs about, then the child needs to get a heart check. Avoid very heavy exercise and work, especially if the child gets short of breath.
- **Dislocated hips** – because the baby's muscles are so loose, sometimes their hips fall out of place – avoid allowing your child to sit in ways that are not normal for their hips, like with their feet outside their hips (W-sitting).

