

# Caring for Your Baby with Down Syndrome

## What is Down syndrome?

It is a genetic condition that causes children to have more health problems and learning difficulties than other children. Finding out that your baby has Down syndrome can be stressful and confusing. Talk with your baby's doctor to find out more about Down syndrome and what it means for your family. Make sure that you take time to enjoy your new baby who, in most ways, will be just like any other baby.

## Can I breastfeed my baby?

Yes, babies with Down syndrome can breastfeed like other babies, and breastfeeding is recommended. Some babies with Down syndrome may have more trouble feeding when they are very little. Getting help from a nurse or breastfeeding specialist in the hospital can help.

## Will my child be able to go to school?

Yes, enrolling in early intervention programs as soon as possible will help your child reach his or her potential. Most children with Down syndrome can go to school. Many can be in the same classroom as other children their own age. Schools offer extra help to children with learning difficulties.

## How do I care for my baby?

Ask your doctor when you should bring your baby in for visits. Ask lots of questions to make sure you understand what is recommended

and why. Talk with your doctor if you have a concern about your baby. The first year of life is very important for growth and making sure that your baby is as healthy as possible.

## Where can I get more information?

### Organizations:

Brighter Tomorrows

<http://www.brightertomorrow.org>

D.A.D.S. (Dads Appreciating Down Syndrome)

<http://www.dadsnational.org>

Medline Plus: Down syndrome

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/downsyndrome.html>

National Down Syndrome Congress

<http://www.ndscenter.org>

National Down Syndrome Society

<http://www.ndss.org>

### Books:

Bodeen SA, DeVito P. *We'll Paint the Octopus Red*. Bethesda, Md.: Woodbine House; 1998.

Hale N, Sternberg K. *Oh Brother! Growing Up with a Special Needs Sibling*. Washington, DC: Magination Press; 2004.

Marshak LE, Prezant F. *Married with Special-Needs Children: A Couples' Guide to Keeping Connected*. Bethesda, Md.: Woodbine House; 2007.



## Caring for Your Baby with Down Syndrome *(continued)*

Pueschel SM. *A Parent's Guide to Down Syndrome: Toward a Brighter Future*. Baltimore, Md.: P.H. Brookes; 2008.

Skallerup SJ. *Babies with Down Syndrome: A New Parents' Guide*. 3rd ed. Bethesda, Md.; Woodbine House; 2008.

Skotko B, Levine SP. *Fasten Your Seatbelt: A Crash Course on Down Syndrome for Brothers and Sisters*. Bethesda, Md.; Woodbine House; 2009.

Soper KL. *Gifts: Mothers Reflect on How Children with Down Syndrome Enrich Their Lives*. Bethesda, Md.: Woodbine House; 2007.

Woloson E, Gough B. *My Friend Isabelle*. Bethesda, Md.: Woodbine House; 2003.

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### Notes:

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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Down syndrome can be caused by one of three types of abnormal cell division involving chromosome 21. Some parents have a greater risk of having a baby with Down syndrome. The risk factors include: Maternal Age. As a woman's eggs age, there is a higher risk of the chromosomes dividing incorrectly. Therefore the risk of Down syndrome increases with a woman's age. Mother's age. Chances of having a child with Down syndrome. 20. 1 in 1,600. If some or all of the characteristic Down syndrome features are present, the health care provider will order a chromosomal karyotype test to be done. If there is an extra chromosome 21 present, the diagnosis is Down syndrome. What are the reasons to test or not test?