



A General Introduction to Down syndrome

- It is believed that people with Down syndrome have lived throughout the ages. However, it was not until 1866 that English doctor, John Langdon Down, studied the attributes of the condition and published a description of the characteristics which subsequently took his name.
- Almost one hundred years later in 1959, Professor Jérôme Lejeune proved that Down syndrome is caused by a chromosomal irregularity. Instead of 46 chromosomes usually present in each cell, Lejeune noted 47 in the cells of people with Down syndrome. It is this additional chromosomal material that results in the physical characteristics associated with the condition and affects the course of development.
- In the past it was believed that there were many things that people with Down syndrome could not do, when in fact they had never been given the opportunity to try. Today these opportunities have never been greater with many people with Down syndrome leading rich and varied lives.
- Children born with Down syndrome are at increased risk for certain health problems. Congenital heart defects, increased susceptibility to infection, respiratory problems, obstructed digestive tracts and childhood leukaemia occur with greater frequency among children who have Down syndrome.
- However, advances in medicine have rendered most of these health problems treatable and the majority of people born with Down syndrome today have a life expectancy of approximately 55 years with the oldest person recorded living to age 74.

For more information contact:

Communications Office, DSC Tel: 661 8000 or email info@downsyndromecentre.ie