

It's Your Move – Down's Syndrome and Dementia

A guide for GP's to plan a strategy that will ensure the right intervention and diagnosis, at the right time, for people with Down's syndrome and dementia.

Treatable conditions that adults with Down's syndrome are more susceptible to that can be confused with dementia.

Poor eyesight		Inflammation of the cornea	Hearing loss
Poor diet – leading to nutritional problems or anaemia.	Constipation	Side effects of medication	Spine disturbance
Cardiac abnormalities – especially if undetected in earlier life	Recent bereavement or significant change	Menopause	Sleep apnoea/ lack of sleep
		Osteoporosis	Compulsive disorders
	Urinary tract infection	Changes in knee or hip joints	Cataracts
Coning of the cornea		Hypothyroidism	Depression
			Diabetes



Some facts about Down's syndrome and dementia

- Whilst almost all adults with Down's syndrome show the plaques and tangles associated with dementia, not all go on to develop the disease.
- Whilst most adults with Down's syndrome who develop dementia have Alzheimer's disease, some may develop other forms of dementia in the same way as the general population.
- It is important to be aware of the conditions overleaf that may mimic the symptoms of dementia, and to rule these out first.
- Regular health checks and screening can identify treatable conditions. Some of these may be present in addition to dementia.
- If an adult with Down's syndrome has depression, they are more likely to answer "I don't know" to questions. If they have dementia they are more likely to give an answer that has no meaning, although they will not be aware of this.
- Carers should be encouraged to monitor and record any changes between visits to the GP.
- The menopause in women with Down's syndrome may begin up to five years earlier than in the general population. Patients with Down's syndrome may not have the communication skills to describe changes in their body, or any associated pain.
- When dementia is diagnosed, Down's Syndrome Scotland recommend that the adult with Down's syndrome, and their carer, are given the diagnosis as soon as possible, along with the option of medical intervention in the early stages.

Symptoms that may indicate the presence of early stage dementia in adults with Down's syndrome.

		Disorientation		Confusion for no obvious reason	
Loss of road sense – may be earlier than in others			No interest in previously enjoyed hobbies		New cognitive loss
	Onset of seizures – may occur earlier than in others			Will attempt tasks without being aware that they are not successful	
					Apathy
Person is not aware that they forget things		Loss of daily living skills		Walking apparently aimlessly	
	New short term memory loss		Deterioration in communication		Loss of social skills

Karen Watchman, 2002

Down's Syndrome

SCOTLAND helping people realise their potential

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