



## Down Syndrome

### What is Down Syndrome?

**Down Syndrome** is a condition present from birth caused by a genetic chromosome defect causing a distinctive pattern of physical features including a flattened skull, pronounced folds of skin in the inner corners of the eyes, large tongue, and short body stature, including degrees of reduced intellectual ability and social and practical skills.

Down syndrome also affects the development of the eyes, which can impact the development of vision. There are several eye conditions that are common for children with Down Syndrome. They range in level of severity.

Mild visual conditions a child with Down Syndrome may experience are: tear duct abnormalities, myopia, hypermetropia, astigmatism, squint, amblyopia, blepharitis or conjunctivitis. Please refer to our additional advice leaflets for advice on these conditions.

More significant conditions a child with Down Syndrome may experience are: nystagmus, cataracts, glaucoma, cerebral vision impairment and keratoconus.

### How does this effect the way the child sees?

Depending on the visual condition a child with Down Syndrome has they may experience the following:

- Blurry vision
- Sits close to the TV
- Squinting
- Closing one eye
- Unusual head tilt
- Poor hand-eye coordination
- Light sensitivity
- Crossing or wandering of one or both eyes
- Ptosis (eyelid droop)
- Tearing or discharge (blocked tear duct)

### What can be done to help?

- As general practice if a child is diagnosed with Down Syndrome they will be referred to an Ophthalmologist to have their vision checked and supported. If a referral has not been made request a referral from the GP.
- Attendance at regular Ophthalmology appointments at least for the first 8 years of life.
- The child may regularly require medicated eye-drops under the guidance of the Ophthalmologist.
- If the child has any of the more significant visual conditions mentioned above, then a referral to the vision support team should be made (by Ophthalmologist, parent, school staff etc). How to refer for support is available in the Local Offer website link below.

## **How can parents, family, friends, and teachers make a difference?**

- Regular eye examinations by an Ophthalmologist are required. The regularity of these will be determined by which eye condition/s the child is diagnosed with.
- Encourage the child to wear their glasses at the relevant times as advised by the Ophthalmologist. If they are struggling to tolerate wearing their glasses, please refer to our leaflet on encouraging children to wear glasses for more advice.
- General advice is that the child should sit at the front of the class/activity and also have teaching resources that are of high-contrast, good quality images and objects, with reduced levels of visual clutter.

Please note the font used in this information leaflet is called Verdana and is used because it is one of the most visually friendly fonts for people with vision difficulties and is also Dyslexia friendly too.

**Further information for support for children and young people with vision loss can be found on the Birmingham Vision Support Local Offer website:**

[Birmingham Vision Support Team](#)

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