

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
	Constipation		Spine disturbance
Poor diet – leading to nutritional problems or anaemia.		Side effects of medication	Sleep apnoea/ lack of sleep
	Recent bereavement or significant change	Menopause	
Cardiac abnormalities – especially if undetected in earlier life		Compulsive disorders	
	Osteoporosis		Cataracts
	Urinary tract infection	Changes in knee or hip joints	Depression
Coning of the cornea		Hypothyroidism	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	
Person is not aware that they forget things	Loss of daily living skills		Apathy
	New short term memory loss	Deterioration in communication	Loss of social skills
		Walking apparently aimlessly	



Karen Watchman, 2002

Down's Syndrome
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