

BASIC MEDICAL SURVEILLANCE ESSENTIALS FOR PEOPLE WITH DOWN'S SYNDROME.

OPHTHALMIC PROBLEMS

(Revised 2006)

(One of a set of evidence based guidelines drawn up by the Down's Syndrome Medical Interest Group(UK) to ensure that no one with Down's syndrome is disadvantaged by failure to detect treatable conditions which are known to be overrepresented among those with the syndrome)

1. There is a high prevalence of ocular disorder among people with Down's syndrome. Refractive errors and/or squint may be present from an early age and persist into childhood (1,2,3). The majority of children with Down's syndrome have reduced accommodation at near (2,4,5). Compared to the general population there is a tenfold increase in congenital cataract (6) and infantile glaucoma may also occur (7). Nystagmus is present in at least 10% (8) . Cataracts and keratoconus may develop in teenage years or later and studies suggest that these are approximately 4 times more common than in the adult general population (9). If untreated most of these disorders are a significant cause of preventable secondary handicap at all ages. Therefore there should be extra vigilance at all ages.
2. As with all children newborns with Down's syndrome should be examined for congenital cataract and other eye anomalies by a trained person and this should be repeated at 6 weeks (10)
3. Visual behaviour must be monitored by the child's paediatrician particularly before the first formal ophthalmologic review. Those who start to squint or show other abnormalities of gaze, visual behaviour or attention should be referred for ophthalmological review.*
4. Between 18 months and 2 years all children with Down's syndrome should have formal ocular/visual assessment by an ophthalmologist/optometrist in accordance with local arrangements. This should include orthoptic assessment, refraction, and fundus examination. At least one third will have ocular/visual defects by this age (1,11,12). Those with deviation from normal should be kept under appropriate specialist review. Refractive errors, most commonly hypermetropia, which often reduce spontaneously in other children, are likely to persist beyond infancy (3, 13). Correction for hypermetropia may be helpful at a younger age than that for typically developing children especially since the majority will have defective accommodation (2, 4, 5).
5. Those with no abnormality at first review should nevertheless have further full ocular/visual assessment including refraction around age 4 years (14, 10). At this age at least 50% are likely to have refractive errors (1).
6. After age 4, due to the increased prevalence of disorders, eye checks should be at least 2 yearly throughout life by professionals with appropriate skills and expertise in managing this client group (14, 15). These may be optometrists (hospital or high-street based) or ophthalmologists. If hypermetropia is not present at age 4 it is not likely to occur later on, but myopia may develop at any age (3, 13).

7. Children and adults with Down's syndrome should be expected to respond to standard vision testing procedures at appropriate developmental age but a distraction free environment and extra time may be necessary to optimise performance. Distance and near functioning vision should be checked at every review and a prescription for near correction or bifocals considered at all ages * (13, 16, 17). Detail vision is likely to remain poorer than expected throughout life even when appropriate spectacles are worn (18,19)
8. Many High Street opticians/optometrists give an excellent service but subjects who are difficult to examine in this setting should be referred to a specialist clinic.*
9. Blepharitis has been reported to occur in up to 30% of children with Down's syndrome (8,20) and can be managed in the usual way (21). Nasolacrimal duct obstruction also occurs commonly (20, 22) and may need specialist referral. *
10. In view of the high prevalence of ocular disorders (see item 1) and the communication difficulties encountered in this client group any child or adult with pain, and/or changing vision, and/or red eye should be referred in the normal way.

* *good practice point*

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