



Down Syndrome and Hearing Loss

Up to 70 percent of people with Down syndrome present with hearing loss. Children should be tested for hearing loss every 6 to 12 months for the first ten years of life. Early diagnosis and treatment of hearing loss is critical to ensure that this condition does not contribute to or cause delays in speech and language, which could mistakenly be labeled as cognitive.

Due to certain anatomical differences, people with Down syndrome are predisposed to experiencing difficulties in the middle ear and Eustachian tube, which often lead to hearing deficits. The Eustachian tube leading from the middle ear to the back of the mouth tends to be much smaller. This can lead to an accumulation of fluid in the middle ear, causing infection or chronic fluid. In addition, ear canals tend to be smaller and narrower. This can lead to blockage by earwax.

Ten percent of people with Down syndrome have permanent, sensori-neural deafness. Others experience processing difficulties that can affect auditory memory. Assessment for interventional purposes is critical.

Management can include pressure equalization tubes in the eardrum for treatment of middle ear fluid, and, when necessary, hearing aids and/or auditory-verbal therapy.

For more information:

National Association for Down Syndrome
www.nads.org

Gallaudet University Education Center
<http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu>