

2023 Respect Life Essay Contest Fact Sheet



What is Down syndrome? Down syndrome occurs when an individual has a full or partial extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional genetic material alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with Down syndrome.

Some facts about people with Down syndrome:

- Approximately one in every 700 babies in the United States is born with Down syndrome – about 6,000 each year. Down syndrome occurs in people of all races and economic levels.
- All people with Down syndrome experience cognitive delays, but the effect is usually mild to moderate and is not indicative of the many strengths and talents that each individual possesses.
- People with Down syndrome attend school, work, participate in decisions that affect them, have meaningful relationships, vote and contribute to society in many wonderful ways.
- Quality educational programs, a stimulating home environment, good health care and positive support from family, friends and the community enable people with Down syndrome to lead fulfilling and productive lives.
- People with Down syndrome have an increased risk for certain medical conditions such as congenital heart defects, respiratory and hearing problems, Alzheimer's disease, childhood leukemia and thyroid conditions. Many of these conditions are now treatable, so most people with Down syndrome lead healthy lives. Life expectancy has increased from 25 in 1983 to 60 today.

Learn more about Down syndrome at the National Down Syndrome Society website <https://www.ndss.org/myths-truths>

Testing for Down syndrome:

- All screening tests, including the NIPS screen, have a high false-positive rate. This means that a test result may say the baby has Down syndrome, when in fact the child does not have Down syndrome.
- Babies diagnosed with Down syndrome in standard of care pre-natal tests are 60 to 90 percent likely to be aborted.

Learn more about Down syndrome and testing at the Charlotte Lozier Institute website: <https://lozierinstitute.org/dive-deeper/down-syndrome/>

Dr. Jerome Lejeune and the discovery of the extra chromosome for Down syndrome:

- In July 1958, during a study of chromosomes of a child, he discovered the existence of an extra chromosome on the 21st pair. For the first time ever, a link was established between a state of mental disability and a chromosomal anomaly.
- Although the results of his research should have helped medicine to advance towards a cure, they are often used to identify children carrying these diseases as early as possible, usually with the aim of terminating pregnancy.
- Lejeune advocated for the protection of the unborn with Down syndrome: he gave hundreds of conferences and interviews across the globe in defense of life.

- In 1974, Pope St. Paul VI appointed him to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. In 1981, he was elected to the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences. In 1994, he became the first chairman of the Pontifical Academy for Life founded by Pope St. John Paul II. He died of cancer on April 3, 1994, Easter morning, 33 days after his appointment.
- The cause for the beatification and canonization of Jérôme Lejeune was opened in 2007.

Learn more about Servant of God Dr. Jerome Lejeune at <https://lejeunefoundation.org/jerome-lejeune/>

Additional resources:

1. <https://katherinebutner.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Down-Syndrome-Infographic.jpg>
2. <https://www.medindia.net/health-infographics/down-syndrome.htm>