



Annual Health Check Information for GPs

Eliciting A Case History

Below is Down's syndrome specific information. The information is for GPs and is to be used alongside DSA's Adult Health Book.

It is important to try and get at least some of the history from the person with Down's syndrome if possible. Family members/supporters may not be aware of some of the symptoms, may under or overestimate the significance or severity of a symptom, or may not realize the impact the illness is having on the person with Down's syndrome.

It is also important to try and establish how the illness is affecting the person's functioning and behaviour (e.g. What is the baseline? How do they usually act or function? Are they acting or functioning differently?)

Difficulties

- Some people with Down's syndrome will have a limited ability to tell you what is wrong and how their illness has progressed
- Some people have limited speech
- Others may speak well but have difficulty assessing and telling you about their symptoms
- Some people may be reluctant to tell you about their illness because they remember previous incidents where they ended up having tests or were hospitalised that they found traumatic
- Some people may have hearing difficulties

Here are some tips that may help you to elicit a history

- Speak slowly and clearly, use short sentences and simple language
- Try to find a place to talk to the person where there are limited distractions and noise
- Give the person time to respond
- If the person doesn't appear to understand the question, ask it again in a different way or use different words
- Start with open ended questions – ones that can't be answered by a simple yes or no
- Try not to put words into people's mouths
- Consider the use of pictures to help the person explain their symptoms – use of pictures representing pain and pictures of different parts of the body can aid in finding the source of discomfort

- Questions involving quantity or time may be particularly challenging. If you can it may help to try and link the question to something concrete in the person's life (e.g. instead of *'how long have you felt this way?'* try *'Did your leg hurt during your dance class?'*)
- Family members, support workers should be able to fill in the gaps where necessary
- Don't just focus on spoken language, observe body language.

Useful websites

'How to' section of the 'Understanding Intellectual Disability & Health' website

<http://www.intellectualdisability.info> then click on the 'How to' section on the right of the menu bar

General Medical Council – Learning Disabilities | <http://www.gmc-uk.org/learningdisabilities/>

The Down's Syndrome Association (DSA) is the only organisation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which supports people with Down's syndrome at every stage of life.

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