



Dementia and Down Syndrome

It is widely accepted that people with Down Syndrome are more likely than the general population to develop Alzheimer's dementia as they age.

- The diagnosis can be problematic in this population for a number of reasons:
 - the large intra-individual variability in cognitive functioning,
 - the different diagnostic and methodological procedures used in the field and
 - the difficulty in obtaining baseline levels of cognitive functioning in this population with which to assess cognitive and behavioural change.
- Generally speaking, there is no single test for the diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease.
- Alzheimer's Disease is diagnosed through a process of elimination. A complete history and physical examination is done.
- Early stage tends to be missed in Down Syndrome because:
 - old behaviours have a tendency to emerge
 - staff tend to focus on behaviours rather than the cause
 - there may be difficulty in obtaining a good history and
 - more difficult to get accurate information from lower-functioning individuals
- Medical problems may manifest as behaviours. Usual tests for diagnosis do not take into account existing disabilities.

Diagnostic Overshadowing

The presenting problem is assumed to be related to the person's intellectual disability

OR

The presenting problem is assumed to be related to the person's age

RATHER THAN BOTH

[Information Sheet No. 18 has a corresponding Challenge Sheet No. C18]