

# Looking after your health

How did your exercise program go? Have you reached your goal of daily exercise? We all fall down at some point-thing is to pick up and keep going. Don't get too disheartened if you haven't got there yet, but if you are doing daily exercise hurrah for you- well done- you can be an example for others. My secretary at work recently ran in the Bridge to Bridge run- her first running race. She trained hard and finished the race without stopping. Before she started training she could not run for five minutes, but now she can run for 12 kilometres. Did anyone of the readers do this race? One of my patients with Down syndrome told me she has taken up boxing, something that I have always wanted to try. Please let me know how you are going with your fitness and send a photo too.

You can be fit and unhealthy, but it is hard to be healthy and unfit!

How do we stay healthy as we get older. When do we start getting old? How old do we have to be before we have to start think about our health?

Scientists say that we act healthily all our lives, not just when we are getting older. If we start young, we may live to be old and enjoy it too!

For example, to have strong bones and muscles when we are older, means that we should do a lot of exercise when we are teenagers. Some people with Down syndrome have weaker bones- it is not their fault, but exercise called 'weight-bearing' is good to strengthen the bones. Examples of weight bearing exercise are walking, skipping, running, and boxing. Swimming is not a weight bearing exercise; it does not hurt the bones and it is still good for your muscles.

Have you had your blood pressure taken this year? You should ask your family doctor to check it. Most people I know with Down syndrome have very good blood pressure. Scientific papers also state that most adults with Down syndrome have good blood pressure- good for you! The best blood pressure value ideally should be 120/80 or less.

Have you had your cholesterol checked? This is the amount of fats in your blood stream. It is bad to have too much as it clogs up the blood vessels in your body. Blood vessels are like soft tubes all through the body and in the skin which carry the blood after it is pumped by the heart. If there is too much cholesterol, the sides of the tubes get all clogged up with 'gunge'- yuk, and blood cannot flow properly. Blood is red because it contains oxygen that your arms, legs, kidneys, brain, eyes and ears, and heart need. Look at the back of your hand and you can see some blood vessels. They look purple under the skin. Your total cholesterol should ideally be less than 4 mmol/l. Ask your GP to please check your cholesterol next time you see them.

Have you checked your weight? Mmmm... this is a tricky issue for most of my patients with Down syndrome. In my opinion, it is hard not to be overweight, but it must be tackled! It takes a constant effort not to overeat. There are so many delicious foods to taste. But being overweight is very very very unhealthy for your whole body. It makes your cholesterol and blood pressure go high, it makes you sluggish, feel bad about yourself, may give you diabetes-so tackle that weight. I have included a table here which states how much you should weigh. Ask your parents or carers to help you measure your height and work out what you should be. Next time you go shopping at Coles or Woolies, think about which foods are 'skinny' (good) and which foods are 'fat' (bad). I try to eat 'skinny' foods six days of the week; maybe once per week I have some 'fat' foods. My favourite 'fat' food is hot chips, my favourite 'skinny' food is delicious steamed rice with vegetables and chilli sauce. You should aim for the ideal weight range, by eating smaller amounts, choosing skinny foods most of the time, and exercising at least half an hour per day.

I am pleased to say that not one of my patients with Down syndrome smokes. I am very proud to say this and often brag to my other doctor friends about this fact. Smoking is very bad. If your friends, workmates, parents or support workers smoke, the best you can do for them is ask them to stop for their own health!

There are some health things that adults with Down syndrome have more often than adults without Down syndrome. For example, I envy the flexibility of many of my patients with Down syndrome. I am in awe of this flexibility which I do not see in my other patients especially not myself.

Dr Roby Wallace,  
SHAID\* Clinics,  
\*Specialised Healthcare for Adults with Intellectual Disability

Heights in cms	Approximate ideal weight range in kg
140	39-49
145	43-53
150	46-57
155	49-61
160	52-65
165	55-68
170	57-73