Down's Syndrome Mail

Spring



Welcome to the Spring edition of Down's Syndrome Mail, a newsletter which will be sent out termly within Parkside to celebrate the Down's community within our school, and share knowledge and positivity!This term I have been focussing on Sports and Down's Syndrome.
Down Syndrome is a genetic condition caused by the presence of an extra chromosome 21, leading to physical, cognitive, and developmental challenges. Despite these hurdles, children with Down Syndrome thrive in inclusive environments, particularly when they are encouraged to participate in physical activities and sports. Here at Parkside, sport offers a unique platform for our CYP to develop physically, socially, and emotionally.

Sport and Down’s Syndrome.



The Benefits of Sports for Children with Down Syndrome

Many children with Down Syndrome experience lower muscle tone (hypotonia), reduced cardiovascular endurance, and a higher likelihood of obesity. Regular participation in sports can help improve their physical fitness, muscle strength, and motor coordination.

Beyond physical benefits, sports play a crucial role in social and emotional and cognitive development. Children with Down Syndrome often face challenges with communication and social interaction. Sports provide an environment where they can build relationships, learn teamwork, and improve their self-confidence.

Focus on Non-Competitive Sports: While competition can be motivating, non-competitive sports or activities emphasizing participation, cooperation, and enjoyment may be more suitable for some children with Down Syndrome.

Numerous success stories illustrate the positive impact of sports on children with Down Syndrome. For example, organizations like the Special Olympics provide opportunities for children to compete in a supportive environment, demonstrating that they are capable of achieving remarkable athletic feats.

Health Challenges and Sport

Hypotonia



Simply put, Hypotonia is ‘low muscle tone’ and common with CYP with Down’s. It leaves muscles feeling too relaxed; however this does not relate to “weakness” in muscle- more that a DS CYP may need more stability not necessarily more strength. There is a common misconception that CYP with Hypotonia can outgrow it; however this is not true and CYP with low muscle tone will become adults with low muscle tone. However children soon find ways to adapt and overcome the challenges Hypotonia can present.

One of the first symptoms parents/carers will see of a child with Hypotonia is delays in milestones like crawling, rolling and standing.

Other symptoms/indications:

- Poor posture
- Breathing difficulties

- Feeding problems
- Delayed speech
- Walking with a wide base
- Poor reflexes



Pronation

Pronation is a common cause of walking problems with kids who have Down syndrome. This occurs when an ankle rolls inward, causing the foot's arch to shrink or disappear completely. This throws your child out of alignment, causing a chain reaction up the body. Although flat feet are fairly common when kids first learn to walk, pronation that is excessive and prolonged can lead to problems down the road.

Parkside Sports & Inclusion



Here at Parkside we recognise that neck Instability in people with Down's Syndrome is more common than the general population.
We provide guidance on safe practice for both families and staff to support this.

At Parkside we offer a range of physical activities to stretch and challenge children and young people. These may include trampolining, gymnastics, horse riding, climbing as well as many playground activities as part of our playground curriculum. We have risk assessments regarding the above activities to ensure safe practice.

Inclusion is our priority and families of Downs pupils; families sign a waiver to make sure that we continue to offer as many opportunities as we can safely and with the knowledge that we are not excluding participation in any activities available.

Please read through the document for more in depth information related to Neck Stability from the Downs Syndrome Association::

www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/20.07.21_Neck-instability-v9-1-l.pdf

Main points (taken from the above document)**:**

No signs or symptoms

Take part in exercise and sports.

Follow safe practices in exercise and sports activities.

Look out for warning signs.

Symptoms

See a doctor.

Do not take part in sports.

Even a minor impact, such as tripping up, may cause damage.

a) Warning symptoms

- Pain anywhere along the neck
- A stiff neck which doesn't get better quickly
- Unusual head posture ('wry neck' or torticollis)
- Alteration in the way a person walks so they may appear unsteady
- Deterioration in a person's ability to manipulate things with his/her hands

As per the guidance, we advise parents/carers to have their child checked by a medical professional if you have any concerns regarding neck instability.

Sport Inspiration Caleb Prewitt



When Caleb was born, the conversation quickly turned to limitations. Down syndrome – then – meant limitations. The laundry list of all the things he wouldn't be able to do. Society and medical professionals painted a negative picture of the life he would have. BUT his parents wanted more than a mediocre life for Caleb; a life as meaningful and as rich and robust as that of his siblings.

They raised him as such; with high expectations. "We gave him as many opportunities as we could. We provided support. We let his teachers and the other adults in his life know that we wanted the best for him".

Fast forward 14 years. He joined the triathlon team for Special Olympics Florida; the youngest person on the team. Doing a triathlon was a risk.

Swimming 400 meters in a lake, biking 12.5 miles on an open course (with cars), running a 5K.
They practiced and trained and learned all we could about triathlons. July 2021 was the month circled on the calendar.
The day came.

At age 14, Caleb became the youngest person with Down syndrome to complete a full-sprint triathlon.
Today, at age 16, he's now completed 20 triathlons, and is training for his first Olympic-distance tri later this summer.
He took a risk. He challenged society's expectations and it paid off. Caleb has inspired others to not only challenge themselves, but to live healthier.

A life without limitations. This is what we all expect and hope for our pupils at Parkside.

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