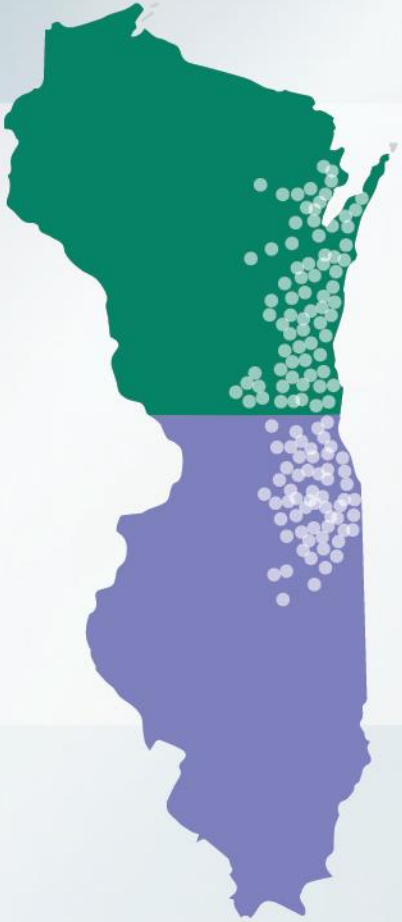


Mental Wellness and Aging in Adults with Down Syndrome

Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota

October 27, 2020 | Brian Chicoine, MD

Advocate Health Care

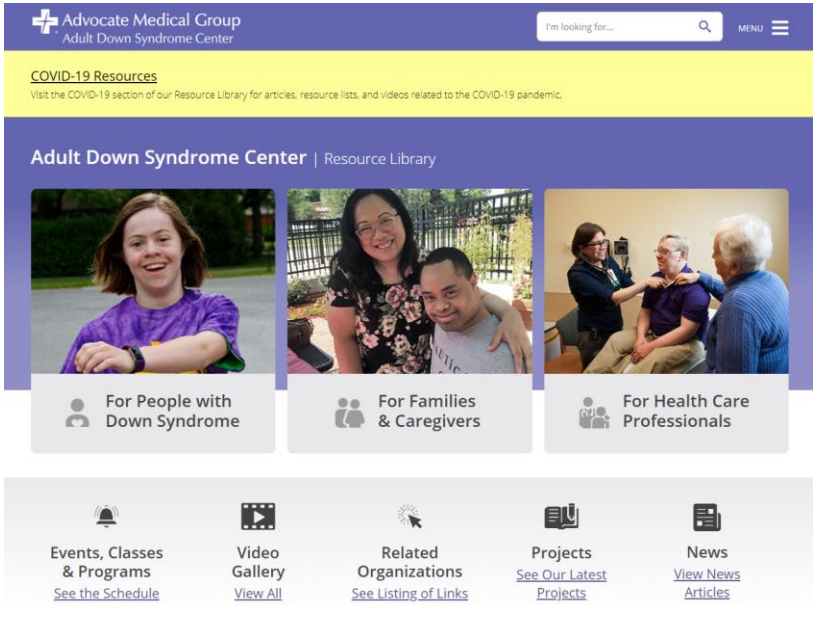
We are AdvocateAuroraHealth

Adult Down Syndrome Center

Park Ridge, IL

Online Resource Library

- Contains videos, articles, and booklets on a variety of topics, including aging, Alzheimer's disease, and mental health.
- Resources are continually being updated.



adscresources.advocatehealth.com

Disclaimer

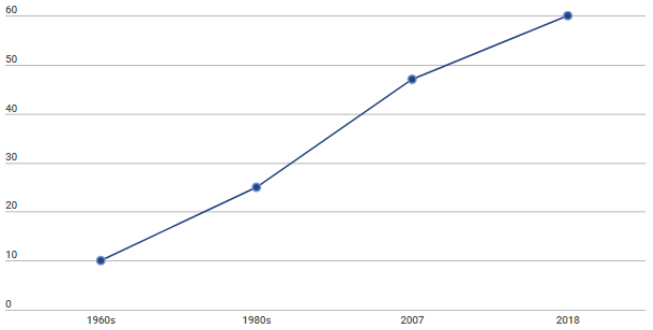
This information is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to serve as a substitute for a medical, psychiatric, mental health, or behavioral evaluation, diagnosis, or treatment plan by a qualified professional.

Agenda

- Describe the connection between physical and mental health.
- Provide an overview of health conditions that occur more frequently as people with DS age.
- Describe characteristics that can be helpful for understanding mental health.
- Share strategies to promote mental wellness and healthy aging.

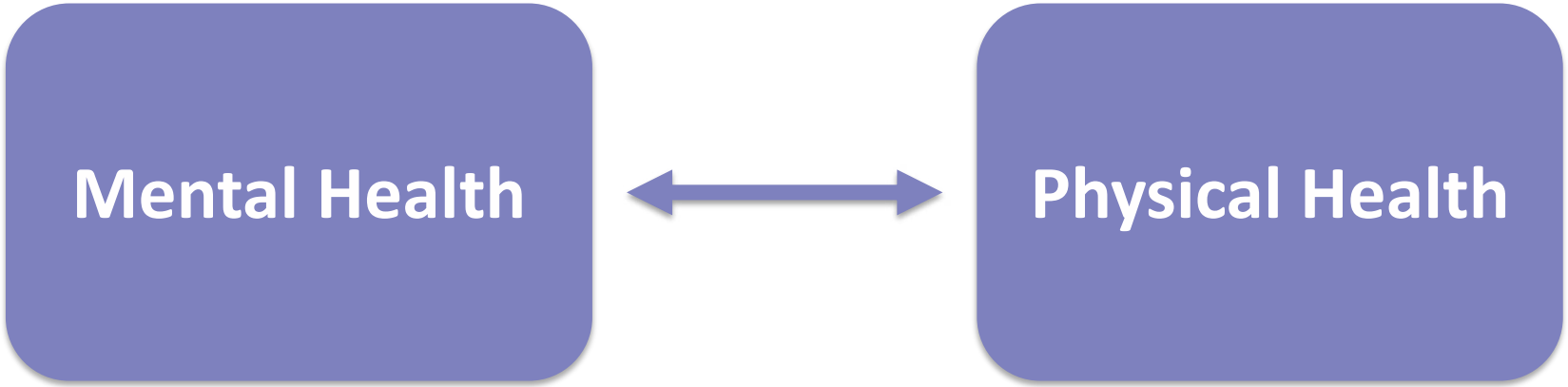
Today, people with Down syndrome are living *longer* and *healthier* than any other time in the past.

- Life expectancy
  - 1907: 9 years
  - 1984: 28 years
  - Today: 60 years



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Global Down Syndrome Foundation
Graphic by Amanda Fahey and Hailey Mensik/Cronkite News

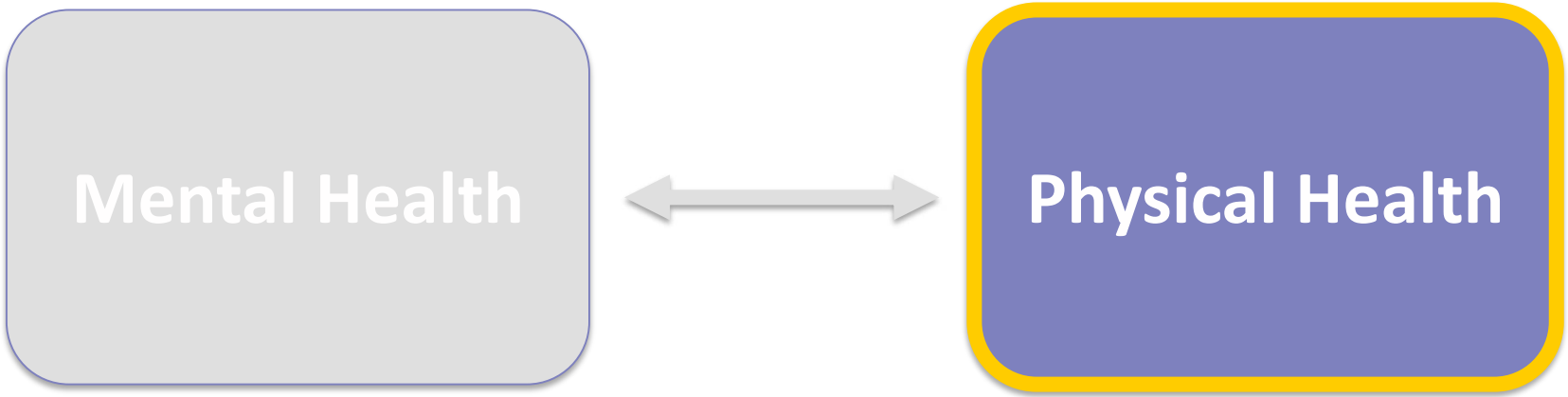
The connection between physical and mental health



It is difficult to be optimally mentally well if you are not feeling well physically.

Any and all behavioral change should be viewed as a possible communication tool.

The connection between physical and mental health



Common health issues that can affect mental wellness

- Sleep disturbances
- Thyroid disorders
- Dehydration
- Gastrointestinal problems

Health conditions more common in aging adults with Down syndrome

- Cataracts
- Osteoarthritis
- Hearing impairment
- Alzheimer's disease

What is Alzheimer's disease (AD)?

- Progressive neurological condition
- Affects the brain
- Is a type of dementia
- Plaques and tangles = the microscopic changes of the brain consistent with AD
  - Also referred to as neuropathologic changes

Association between DS and AD

- Nearly all people with Down syndrome have plaques and tangles by age 40.
- All people with DS over age 60.

Does everyone with Down syndrome get Alzheimer's disease?

- Eventually, everyone with DS gets the neuropathologic changes.
- But NOT everyone gets symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

Why is AD more common in DS?

- One of the genes associated with AD is on the 21st chromosome.
  - Amyloid precursor protein (APP)
- Since people with DS have an extra full or partial copy of the 21st chromosome, they have more of the gene.

What is the incidence of clinical Alzheimer's disease?

- AD thought to be uncommon before age 40.
- Incidence estimated to be 55% in those between ages 50-59.
- Incidence estimated to be greater than 75% in those 60 years of age and older.

Mann et al. 1984, McCarron et al. 2014, Coppus et al. 2006, Strydom et al. 2018

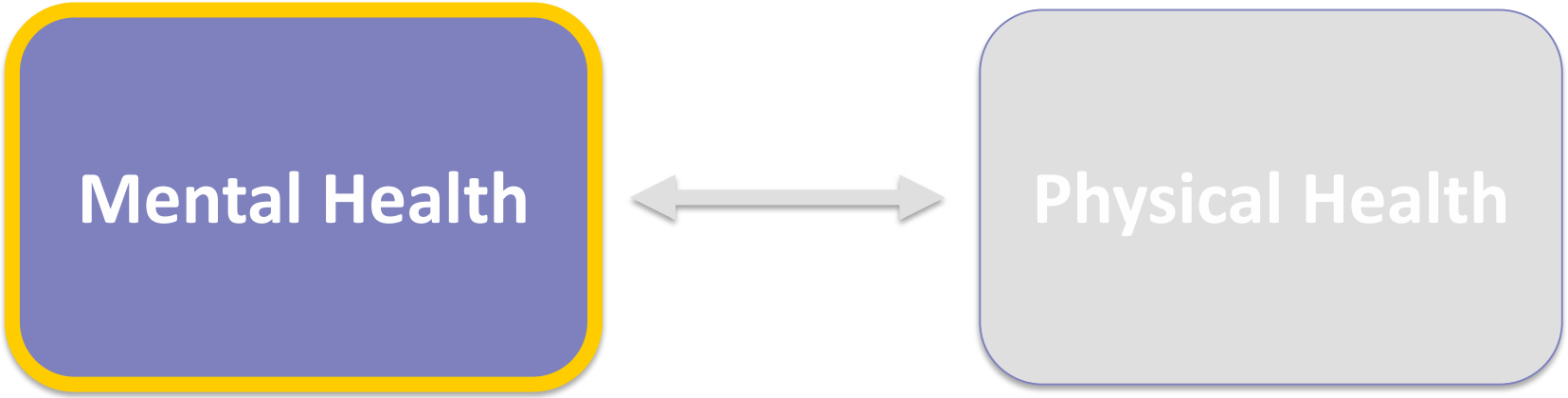
Symptoms

- Memory deterioration
- Loss of previously mastered skills
- Incontinence
- Changes in gait
- Dysphagia (swallowing)
- Seizures
  - Higher rate (77% vs 2-25%)
- Weight loss
- Psychological changes

Diagnosis

- Look for symptoms and a pattern of decline.
- Rule out other causes.
  - Examples:
    - Vitamin B12 deficiency
    - Depression
    - Sleep apnea
    - Hypothyroidism
    - Cataracts

The connection between physical and mental health



What is (usually) not mental illness?

- The Groove
- Self-talk
- Strong memory and the concept of time

Promoting mental wellness

- Getting good sleep

Good sleep hygiene habits

- Allow time for your body to digest dinner.
- Fall asleep at the same time each night.
- Set up a healthy sleep space.
- Establish a bedtime routine.
- Wake up at the same time each morning.
- Drink water as soon as you wake up.
- Walk/stretch within 1st hour of waking up.

Sleep hygiene habits to avoid

- Consume caffeine before bed.
- Eat sugar before bed.
- Drink alcohol before bed.
- Exercise vigorously before bed.
- Watch TV in bed.
- Use your phone or tablet in bed.
- Linger in bed in the morning.

Using devices at night

- Turn off alerts.
  - Do Not Disturb or Silent Mode
- Minimize the impact of blue light.
  - Night Shift / Night Mode device settings
  - Blue light filter apps

Use Night Shift on your iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch

Night Shift automatically adjusts the colors of your display to the warmer end of the spectrum—making the display easier on your eyes.

About Night Shift

Night Shift[1] uses the clock and geolocation of your device to determine when it's sunset in your location. Then it automatically shifts the colors of your display to warmer colors. In the morning, it returns the display to its regular settings.

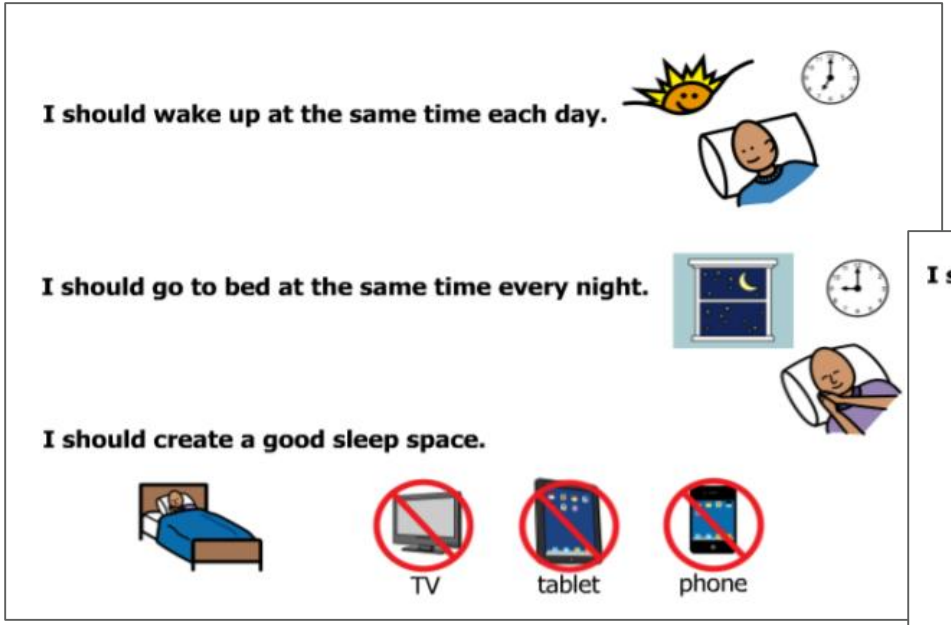
Turn on Night Shift

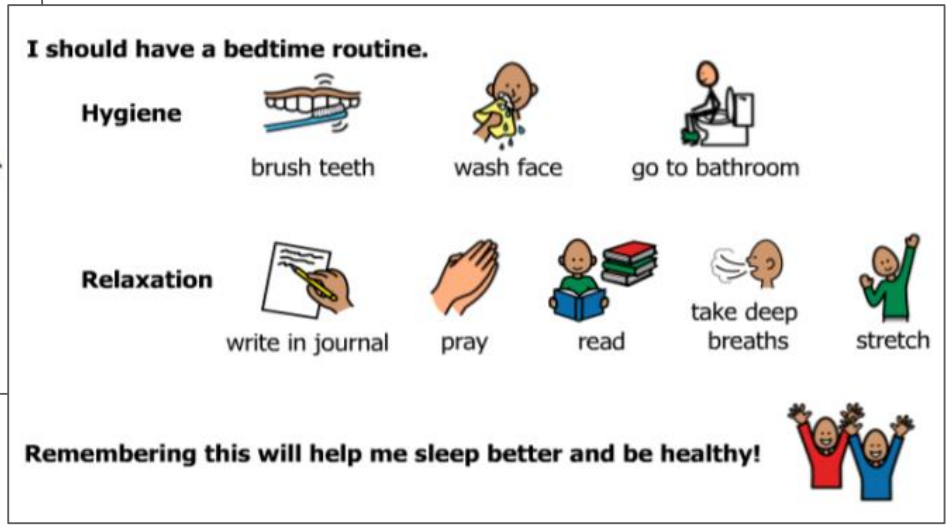
There are two ways to turn Night Shift on and off:

- Open Control Center. Firmly press the Brightness control icon, then tap to turn Night Shift on or off.
- Go to Settings > Display & Brightness > Night Shift.[2] On the same screen, you can schedule a time for Night Shift to turn on automatically and adjust color temperature.

By default, Night Shift turns on from sunset to sunrise.

Ways to get good sleep





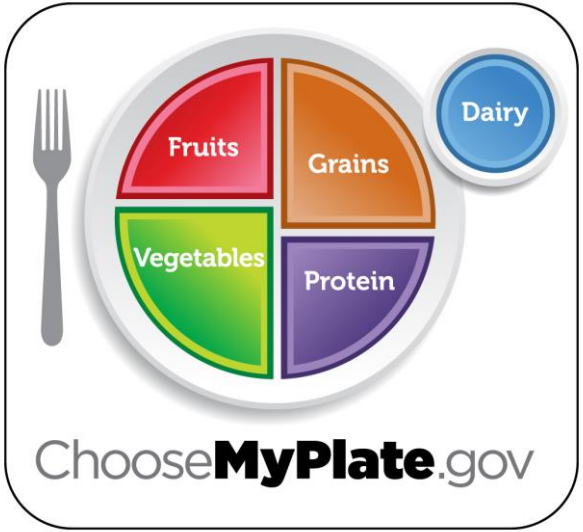
[Link to resource]

Promoting mental wellness

- Getting good sleep
- Healthy eating

Healthy eating

- Hydration
- Balanced meals (all the food groups)
- Portion size
- Limit processed foods and pop/soda
- Small changes add up



Eat fruits and vegetables with every meal.

Starting your meal with a salad is a good way to do this.

Or fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables.

Choose grilled food instead of fried food.

Eat grilled chicken or fish instead of fried or crispy chicken or fish.

Limit condiments and dressings.

Ask for salad dressing on the side. Only use some of the dressing.

[Link to resource]

Be aware of how much food you eat.

Eat your meal. Drink some water. Wait a few minutes. Go back for seconds only if you are still hungry.

Eat slowly. Put your fork down between bites of food. Or take a sip of water between bites of food.

Promoting mental wellness

- Getting good sleep
- Healthy eating
- Exercise/physical activity

Exercise/physical activity

- Find what works for the individual
- Fun and social
- Incorporate it throughout the day
- Go outdoors

Link to resource

Promoting mental wellness

- Getting good sleep
- Healthy eating
- Exercise/physical activity
- Manage stress

Manage stress

- Be aware of “empathy radar” or “social sensitivity.”
- Provide “in the moment” support when possible.
- Work with a mental health provider.
  - Consider therapies (e.g. music, art).

Close your eyes

Use a stress ball

Spend time outside

Listen to music

Take deep breaths

Play with a pet

Dance to a favorite song

Color

Talk to family or friends

Exercise

[Link to resource]

Promoting mental wellness

- Getting good sleep
- Healthy eating
- Exercise/physical activity
- Manage stress
- Employment, recreation, and social opportunities

Employment, recreation, and social opportunities

- Involvement promotes physical, mental, and social health.
- Find options that match interests and skills.
- “Safe” reintroduction

Challenges to maintaining mental wellness

- Family changes
  - E.g. Siblings moving out, getting married, etc.
- Changes in living situation
- Loss of a loved one
- COVID-19
- Aging

Strategies to promote mental health and support aging adults

Visual supports

- Pictures, words, or other images that are used to…
  - Help communicate
  - Share or manage expectations
  - Provide reminders
  - Teach new information

Home safety

- Contrasting colors
- Adequate lighting in rooms and hallways
- Add handrails and ramps
- Shower chair and/or handheld shower head
- Add reflective tape on stairs
- Remove throw rugs

A toilet or bath may not be seen or used appropriately if the bathroom is white.

Adding colour as shown here makes the toilet easier to see.

Link to resource

Optimizing independence

- Contrasting colors
- Weighted utensils
- Visuals

This shows how a white plate may become lost against a white table or cloth.

By adding a coloured background the plate is easier to identify.

Communication

- Be on the same level.
- Use short sentences.
- Avoid arguing and correcting.
- Do not ask if they remember.

Take home points

- Consider the interaction between physical and mental health.
- Alzheimer's disease is more common but consider other diagnoses (particularly before age 40).
- Remember common characteristics that are not usually mental illness.
- There are many ways to promote mental wellness. These can be built into daily life.

Questions?

Resource Library

adscresources.advocatehealth.com

Facebook

facebook.com/adultdownsyndromecenter

E-mail Newsletter

eepurl.com/c7uV1v