

■P15

Messages from an Experienced Mom

Kaoru Tachibana

When individuals with Down syndrome are babies, you may wonder about their potential for growth and development. But don't worry! An experienced mom created a manga (comic book) which describes the daily life and development of cheerful Yunta, who has Down syndrome. We are sure that life for your baby and family will be filled with daily joy. We hope you will get this message from her manga.

* Kaoru Tachibana *

Born in 1970. Made her debut as a manga artist after working as an editor for a fashion magazine. Her energetic personality is reflected in her manga. Every day she faces the challenges presented by her four boys including her husband and their eldest son Yunta, who has Down syndrome. Thanks to Yunta's easygoing nature, laughter is frequent and family ties are the strongest they have ever been.

■P16

Messages from an Experienced Mom

I'm the mother of an elementary school kid Junta (called Yunta). He has Down syndrome.

"Hello!" "I'm Kaoru Tachibana."

"ello"

A little over 7 years ago, I was holding a little Yunta and felt overwhelmed with anxiety. "What is our life going to be like?" "Daddy too, of course."

"But I'm just fine now." Now I wonder where my worries from that time have gone. Of course, Daddy is fine too.

Kids with Down syndrome always do grow and develop.

* This was drawn and written in 2013.

■P17

Yunta walks

runs

eats

cries

laughs

and he also reads between the lines

He isn't good at speaking
"ello!" (meaning "Hello")
"I'm Ta." (meaning "I'm Yunta.")

But he can have conversations and sometimes he makes silly jokes.
"I'm O-Cake!" (instead of "I'm OK!")

It's often said that individuals with Down syndrome have distinctive facial features, but they definitely take after their parents in appearance (and perhaps personality too!)

"He looks like me!!"
"No, like me!!"
"I don't care either way."

■ P18

Of course, parents don't have to stop working.
Lots of moms work full-time. "I do, too!"
Some work for foreign-affiliated firms.
Others in mass communication.

Raising kids with Down syndrome isn't necessarily a financial burden. A Techou (Rehabilitation Certificate) actually provides many benefits...

They learn how to read and write.
We can travel abroad with them.
They can also make friends.

They have their own hobbies! Yunta likes to watch professional wrestling!!

■ P19

"If you are worried, just ask someone for help!"
Moms with experience
Local health centers
Oya No Kai (Parent Support Groups)
Japan Down Syndrome Society (JDS)

When we raise children, we often feel worried or distressed.
This is the case whether your child has Down syndrome or not.
Second son

Third son

At some point in the future you will wonder, “What was I so anxious about?”

Everything is definitely going to be “O-Cake!”

■ P20

A Comic about Yunta and his Growth and Development

Soon after Birth

Children with Down syndrome develop at a slower pace. It may seem like they sleep all the time for the first few months. They also tend to have a weak sucking reflex so it might take longer for them to breastfeed.

In Yunta’s case, breastfeeding did take a long time. It took up so much time that I did almost everything, e.g., my work, the laundry, cooking and even yoga while breastfeeding him (haha).

Breastfeeding became easier when Yunta was 7 months old. At that time he learned how to roll over. In the next 2 months he learned how to sit up independently. Kids with Down syndrome have flexible bodies. Yunta could do splits!

When Yunta was 9 months old, he could roll over.
He raised his upper body
He did splits (I couldn’t believe it!)
He sat up! Look at that beautiful middle splits pose. Yeah!

* It’s not always recommended that children with Down syndrome do splits. Ask for advice from your child’s physical therapist if you are concerned.

■ P21

The Pre-Walking Stage

After Yunta learned to sit up, it took him longer than expected to stand up and start walking.

We wanted him to start walking as soon as possible, so we bought him a toddler pushcart, a baby-walker, and a pair of high-cut sneakers from overseas that provided ankle support. We also had Yunta practice walking at a Ryouiku facility.

However, I understand now that no matter what we did he wasn’t going to start walking until his muscles

developed.

Try not to get worried or depressed. The quickest and most effective way to support your child's development is to be patient, give him/her lots of love, and all the time he/she needs.

Congrats! He stood up by himself at 2 years "He STOOD UP!!"
Congrats! He took his first step at 2 years and 1 month "He TOOK A STEP!!"
Congrats! He took more than 3 steps (42 steps) at 2 years and 5 months!!
"He W-A-L-K-E-D!!" (My husband and I were so excited.)

■ P22

About Diapers

Yunta started toilet training when he was 4 and a half years old. He was successful 90 % of the time after he turned 5.

We didn't actually encourage Yunta to give up diapers. He realized that he was the only one still wearing diapers in his class at nursery school. He decided on his own that it was time to stop wearing them.

Yunta wasn't potty-trained yet so this was not an easy task.

Potty training started with Yunta wetting his pants and wondering what it was that felt so cold. Potty training was by far one of my biggest accomplishments as a mother (haha).

Yunta tends to start things without thinking them over. I have to admit that he has inherited this from me.

When Yunta was 4 and a half "Diapers are for babies..."
"I'm old enough to wear underpants now."
Pee...
"Cold!! What's this?" Hey!!

■ P23

The Joy of Raising a Child who Develops at a Slower Pace

Standing, walking, and speaking are the three biggest milestones in a child's development. However, children with Down syndrome tend to grow and develop at a slower pace. There are a number of variations for each milestone.

Standing while looking back, standing while clapping one's hands, standing while making a peace sign... There are about 100 variations in the category of standing. This means there are more milestones to

celebrate.

As a result, we have more memories and photos of Yunta than we do of our second and third sons (haha).

It is taking Yunta two or three times (or maybe more?) longer to grow and develop, but we feel 10 times more surprised, happy, and moved when he reaches his milestones.

Yunta 2 years and 1 month He drank juice with a straw for the first time
2 years and 2 months He drank fizzy drinks with a straw for the first time
“What is this? It tastes so good!”
2 years and 3 months He drank from a PET bottle with a straw for the first time
2 years and 4 months He drank with a straw at a restaurant for the first time
There are four variations in the category “Drinking with a straw.”

■ P24

You Can Work Too!

When we learned that Yunta had Down syndrome, the first thought that came to my mind was not about his health or his future but the idea that I might have to give up my career.

I used to think that parents who gave birth to children with disabilities would have to look after them for their entire lives. However, I did not need to quit my job or give up anything else after giving birth to Yunta.

There are usually various services and benefits available. Don't hesitate to consult with a government office or a local health center.

Yunta goes to Gakudou club (after school daycare).
A helper accompanies him on his way home from the club.
When his favorite helper goes to pick him up, he wants to spend more time with him/her and doesn't come straight home.
“Hi, Yunta. Let's go home!” “Yunta, let's go home?!” “Let's go home!?”

*You can consult with the welfare department in your city or a local health center about the benefits and services available for disabled children and their parents.

■ P25

The Characteristics of Down Syndrome

Down syndrome is a genetic condition in which a person is born with an extra chromosome. It is not an

illness.

Even though Down syndrome itself is not an illness, it could have complications such as heart defects, intellectual disabilities, or poor muscle tone. (Individuals with Down syndrome are often said to have distinctive facial features, but they all look like their own parents.)

The disabilities associated with Down syndrome vary from child to child. Yunta had a speech delay and he rarely spoke real words until he was 3.

He gradually spoke more words after the age of 3. However, he only pronounced the last letter of each word, which was a mystery to us ...

It required a high level of analysis to understand Yunta who said “u-do-n” when he meant to say “Gyu-u-do-n” (haha).

Yunta’s first word was “Kippu.” He was 2 years and 11 months old.

“Kippu (train ticket)?” (Dad) “What’s Kippu?” (Mom)

No, no

“Kippu!!” “What are you trying to say!?”

The answer was “Tamagoyaki ni ketchup kakete (=Put ketchup on the rolled egg).”

■P26

The Past 7 Years

Seven years have passed since Yunta was born. He currently goes to the special needs class in the public elementary school in our neighborhood. He has made slow but steady progress. He learned his route to school and how to read and write hiragana. He also plays with friends his own age.

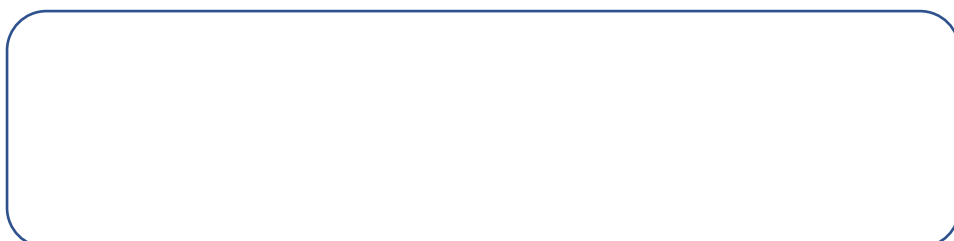
He has a few hobbies and enjoys watching professional wrestling after he finishes his homework.

Yunta is small so when he wears his school backpack, he looks like a mountain climber from behind. We feel happy and grateful about the progress Yunta has made as we watch him walk to school every morning.

We really look forward to seeing Yunta continue to grow and develop.

He may have a special talent that will reveal itself later.

We want to continue to look after, encourage, and protect Yunta who is full of possibilities.



Yellow cover for child's school backpack
Yellow cap
When he smiles,
we can see the four baby teeth he has lost. He is a typical first grader!!

* This comic was written and illustrated in 2013.

■ P27

When you find out your child has a disability you don't experience immediate acceptance.

You don't have to be a Major League baseball player.
You don't have to have to be as good looking as a movie star
You don't have to work at a first-class firm.

Living life happily with a smile on your face is enough.

If you feel this way from the bottom of your heart, you have taken the first step toward acceptance.

* Tachibana-san is the mother of the three boys including Yunta, and the author of the following essay comics which are full of laughter and tears.

“Memoirs of the slow development of Yunta – raising a child with Down Syndrome”(2013)

“Memoirs of the slow development of Yunta – the eldest son of the Tachibana family”(2014)

“Please hurry and grow up and become mature adults! To my first, second, and third son, as well as my husband” (2016)

The following essay explains the child-rearing of Tachibana-san, with illustrations.

“I am a mother of a kid with Down Syndrome! My daily life and the support I received are described within.” (2014)