

LUC: OUR BABY WITH DOWN SYNDROME

Roché Snyman



In February 2006 we had our second child, a beautiful baby boy named Luc. Although strong and healthy in all areas, Luc was diagnosed with *Down Syndrome* soon after birth. This genetic disorder results when a baby is conceived with an extra copy of chromosome 21 and thus have 47 chromosomes altogether, resulting in a variety of features that could include developmental delays, some unique physical features and an elevated risk for certain health conditions.

Our first area of intervention was aimed at Luc's physical development. It was at this point that we were introduced to the world of BabyGym, through the very supportive help and encouragement of Babygym developer dr Melodie de Jager. At the time, Luc had just turned one and although he did not have the typical low muscle tone associated with Down Syndrome, he was not crawling yet. Dr de Jager immediately taught me the basic BabyGym massage routine, as well as a few exercises aimed specifically at teaching the brain the basic movements, whilst strengthening the necessary muscles for crawling. And of course I also learnt to rub the ears...

I rushed home and taught everyone in Luc's vicinity what to do. We started rubbing ears, massaging, and doing trunk exercises while singing "*The wheels of the bus go round and round...*" whenever we had the chance! Poor Luc must have thought we all went over the deep end! He reacted with much curiosity at first, and the "I Love You" tummy massage especially caught his undivided attention. We also purchased a cooler box to help him into the crawling position whilst keeping his attention with an interesting toy at the top.

Two weeks after we started the BabyGym regime, Luc started crawling properly, albeit slowly. His brain learnt to make the right moves and coordinate his muscles to crawl, but his muscles were still too weak to enable him to keep this up for longer than 4 steps at a time. Dr de Jager encouraged us to keep doing the trunk rotations and leg cycling exercises to strengthen his muscles. This, together with much ear-rubbing, worked so well that within a month our boy was crawling all over and at such a speed that we are still battling to keep up with him!

At 18 months old Luc was still crawling strongly. We did not put any pressure on him to start walking, as we have learnt from BabyGym that his brain development is benefited tremendously by the crawling actions. Other beneficial exercises included stimulating the facial muscles and tongue to create awareness of these organs and to strengthen the muscles. Down Syndrome causes low muscle tone which results in the characteristic protruding tongue. The BabyGym exercises has

already lessened this behaviour to such an extent that people are commenting on the fact that his little tongue is progressively less protruding. These exercises will definitely also help with his speech development.

I have since trained as a BabyGym instructor and have witnessed very quick developmental changes in the babies that I have had to put through the BabyGym *Firm foundations* course for my practical training. I am personally sold out to BabyGym and we are forever grateful for the work of Dr de Jager, as our Luc is definitely a witness for the developmental gains of the programme.

Luc is now 22 months old and to the absolute delight of his whole family who were all together for Christmas, he started walking! We were so proud of him! He is strong and courageous and every day he walks a little bit further and stronger. The cheering of the whole family, which definitely equals their recent cheering for the Springbok team who won the world cup, inspires him to try even harder – he loves it! Thanks Babygym for strengthening those muscles!

