



Visiting the Doctor

How can I prepare my child for a visit to the doctor?

Going to the doctor can be stressful for any child. For a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), there may be extra challenges because of sensory, communication, and other symptoms. Here are some tips to help make visiting the doctor easier.

- Many children with ASD have a hard time with changes in routine and new situations, so getting ready ahead of time can help. Talk with your child about the doctor visit before you go so that he knows what will happen. This may help your child do what he needs to do at the visit.
 - Many books, videos, and other materials explain in a positive way what will happen at the doctor's or dentist's office. They also point out that most things that happen there don't hurt, and the ones that might are done quickly. Social stories may be helpful for your child. Social stories are stories with pictures and words that show and tell what will happen at the visit. These stories can help a child know what to expect and how to behave. You can review the story and practice ahead of time.
 - Practice some of the steps with your child at home. Take your child's temperature or blood pressure; look into her mouth, ears, and nose with a flashlight; and use a tongue depressor or a stethoscope. A toy doctor's kit might have some tools that look like the real thing and can be fun for the child to play with. This can also be done in play with a doll or stuffed animal.
 - Make a schedule board for your child so that he knows what will happen during the visit. You can use photographs, drawings, or words for each step and give a reward at the end. The reward can be a small treat, a high five, verbal praise, or an activity your child likes, like a video game or bubbles.
- explain. A visit to the doctor or dentist can be seen as a bad thing, as it may often be connected with getting shots or being sick.
- Not knowing and being afraid can lead to problem behavior.
 - Try to ease anxiety and make a more enjoyable link with the doctor's office by practicing visits. You can go to the office with your child and sit in the waiting room while doing something your child enjoys.
 - Let the office staff know ahead of time of anything that helps your child with medical visits. This could be not waiting too long, using simpler language, and dimming the lights. If your child has trouble with certain tasks or needles, think about a separate short visit just for shots. This will make the visit shorter and easier to deal with.
 - Organize yourself to keep the visit moving along. Bring a written list of questions or issues to talk with the doctor. Some children do well if the doctor or dentist can go over the order of the visit with them and check off (verbally or on a list) when each part of the visit is done.
 - Make copies of any important papers (such as testing by specialists) and bring them to the visit to give to the doctor. If you can, bring another person to the doctor's office to help with your child. This way, you don't have to be rushed or worried about your child's behavior while you talk with the doctor. Some doctors can also schedule special visits to meet alone with them. This can be when you have many questions and you know your child can't sit still or wait during long visits.
 - You may want to bring activities or toys that your child likes to help keep her busy during waiting times. These can make her feel safe and calm.
 - Do what you can to make your child's time at the doctor's office shorter. Try to get slots in the day where waiting times will be shortest and the waiting room will be quiet. Remind the office staff ahead of time that your child has ASD so that they will do their best to see your child as quickly as possible. Help the nurse or doctor during the checkup by calming your child or helping. Giving a special reward right after the visit might help your child feel happier about the visit and calm down faster if she is upset.
 - Let the office know the best time of day for your child to have a visit. You can ask the office to follow a routine so your child knows what to expect. Ask if the same staff can see your child and if your child can be seen in the same room each visit. Let them know that your child may need more time.

What if preparing ahead of time doesn't help? What else can I do to make the visit go smoothly?

- Sometimes, doctor or dentist visits are stressful even when you get ready ahead of time. Children with ASD may have a hard time with language and may not understand what you



Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics HealthyChildren.org:

www.HealthyChildren.org

Autism Speaks. *Dental Guide*. New York, NY: Autism Speaks.

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/dental-tool-kit>. Accessed May 21, 2019

Autism Treatment Network, Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health. *Taking the Work Out of Blood Work: Helping Your Child With ASD; A Parent's Guide*. New York, NY: Autism Speaks; 2011. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/atnair-p-parents-guide-blood-draws>. Accessed May 21, 2019

Bailey CA. *Going to the Doctor: A Picture Social Skills Story Book*. New York, NY: DRL Books; 2002

Autism Speaks "Autism and the Doctor Visit: Communication Tips for Success": www.autismspeaks.org/expert-opinion/autism-and-doctor-visit-communication-tips-success

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