



Visits to a Doctor or Dentist Office

- Ask other families who have children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) about the dentists and doctors they prefer. Every child is different, but it is helpful to find reputable healthcare providers who have experience treating children with ASD.
- Ask the healthcare provider if you can schedule a practice visit in order to meet and get to know the office staff and healthcare provider. Discuss the child's method of communication, interests, challenges, and things that calm and motivate him or her. Because many people with autism have various levels of sensitivity to sound, touch, light, and other sensations, it may be helpful for the child to become familiar with equipment that may be used, before the appointment occurs.
- Patience and time are especially important to successful medical appointments for people with ASD. Request an appointment time at the end of the day so that it will not feel rushed and healthcare staff can focus on the needs of the child.
- When going to the appointment, let the child bring his or her favorite toy or video game. This will help him or her feel more comfortable and occupied during the wait and office procedures. Ask the provider to interact with the child before the examination and to permit the child to sit on the floor or on a parent's lap to play with their toy or game rather than sit on an exam table.
- Visual aids can help to familiarize various medical and dental procedures. Social stories and activity schedules can be used to describe and illustrate methods and equipment. It may also be helpful to role play with the child to practice various medical and dental examinations such as using a stethoscope, getting an X-ray, and opening the mouth while sitting in a chair. A template to create social stories, as well as other helpful resources, can be found at www.childrens-specialized.org/KohlsAutismAwareness.
- Ask the healthcare provider to explain a procedure before it happens and to specify each step as it happens. This may help the person with ASD make sense of what is being done.
- When emergency care is needed, it is important to tell the emergency healthcare providers about the child's overall health status, challenges, changes in behavior, and any related diagnoses or "co-morbidities." These may include anxiety, seizure disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and sleep or feeding issues. This information can help prevent misinterpretation of symptoms or suggest additional testing. In addition, let them know if there are any specific triggers that may cause challenging behaviors to occur.
- It may be helpful for school staff to target lessons that prepare the child for healthcare appointments. For example, a procedure can be broken down into small steps by school-based therapists and staff and practiced with family members at home.
- When injections or blood draws are needed, it is common to request additional staff for the procedure. Locate a phlebotomist who is familiar with working with people with ASD and discuss preferred reinforcers and challenges related to the child to help make the procedure successful.
- It may be helpful to work with a behavior therapist to assist in pre-teaching skills related to doctor and dentist visits and procedures. Sometimes arrangements can be made for a therapist to accompany the family to assist in these appointments.

