

Tips on visiting the Doctors and Dentist

A visit to the doctors or dentist can be a daunting experience for many, but for some autistic people it can cause even more high levels of stress and anxiety. The waiting, unpredictability and sensory overload are just some of the factors to take into consideration. We have put together a list of things to consider to make your visit as positive and smooth as possible.

Before:

- Speak to other parents / carers who have done it before. Online forums are a good place to start
- Look for recommendations on 'autism friendly' practices where other parents / carers have had a positive experience or where there are autism experienced practitioners
- When booking the appointment check that there is a note on the file regarding diagnosis and ask what reasonable adjustments can be made.
- Wherever possible make appointments with the same doctor / dentist for consistency.
- Consider the time you book the appointment for. There may be a time of day when the practice is quieter or there may be a time of day which works better - ie it may be more calm in the mornings.
- Visit the practice alone before attending the appointment to make a note of any possible triggers within the environment.
- Check to see if the practice has a website. There may be photographs of the waiting room or even the professional you have an appointment with. If not ask the practice if they would be happy for you to take your own photographs or if they could send you some images.
- Write a visual story to help prepare ahead of time. This should outline what will happen before, during and after the appointment. Ensure you make this specific to what the appointment is for (e.g. blood tests, tooth fillings.) Take photos of the different areas in the practice and include these.
- Find a story book about going to the doctors or dentist and read this with the person

During:

- Take a 'toolkit' with you; this could include ear defenders or headphones, chew toys, and fidget toys, activities, snacks etc. This may help fill the time whilst waiting for the appointment and also be a welcome distraction and comfort.
- Use visual schedules – 'now and then' cards.
- Use visual countdowns; for example, you may use a five-minute timer when having a check-up or a one-minute timer when having bloods taken.
- Always allow extra time. For some this will be helpful so there's extra time to transition and explore their environment.
- Ask if you are able to wait outside and be called when it's your turn. This could help relieve the stress caused by being in a busy waiting area.

After:

As much as visiting the dentist with your friend or loved one could be stressful for you, remember also that it was likely extremely stressful for the person having the appointment and they may need time to recover and decompress. Ensure you offer this time, and validate their feelings.

