

FAMILY TIP SHEET

11 Great Ideas to Get the Best from Your Child's Health Care Visit

for families of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Before the Visit

1. Find the right doctor.

Your child's doctor should feel like a good fit for your family. You should feel like you are being included in treatment decisions for your child. You should get the information you need about your child's diagnosis and treatment, in a way that works for you. Sometimes the doctor's experience with Autism is not as important as a willingness to listen, learn, and work with you.

2. Arrange the best possible visit conditions.

Schedule at the best time of day for your child. Consider sensory triggers, and address those with office staff if possible. (For example, they might dim the lights in the waiting area if your child is sensitive to bright lights.) Think about how to minimize stress for your child if the wait time is longer than expected.

3. Make a "Care Notebook."

Consolidate information there about your child's health, health care providers, medications, etc. Make a plan for how best to treat your child in an emergency room setting, and put that plan in the notebook. Invite your doctor to see it and add to it. Learn how to access your child's electronic medical record.

4. Prepare your child.

You know your child's triggers, and how best to avoid them. Consider how and when to talk with your child about the upcoming appointment. Prepare your child as best you can with just enough information to increase confidence and decrease anxiety. You could stop by the office beforehand, so it feels familiar when you arrive for the appointment. You can also offer rewards for cooperation. A "visual schedule" is helpful for many children with ASD. You can find examples online.



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5. Prepare yourself.

Write down your questions in advance. Gather any information you want to share with the doctor, like school information and the care notebook. Bring whatever tools you need to keep your child as calm as possible before and during the appointment.

6. Prepare your child.

Call ahead to let the staff know your child is coming, and tell them anything they need to know about your child's needs, sensitivities, or possible behaviors. Give them the information they need to help your child have a successful visit.

During the Visit

7. Advocate for your child.

Speak up at appointments. Don't be shy about telling the doctor what your child is experiencing. Share your perspective with confidence. If you disagree with your child's doctor on something, it is reasonable to discuss that. Be honest about family health history (including mental health or substance abuse). Tell the doctor if you have obstacles to making appointments, like transportation problems.

8. Talk about safety concerns.

These might include self-injurious behavior, wandering or running off, aggression, and risky behavior around pools, animals, or people who pose a danger.

9. Ask about nutrition, sleep, and exercise.

Talk with the doctor about your child's eating, and about activities like swimming, dance, etc. The doctor might be able to write a letter of support to help open doors to such activities if there is resistance from people who are unsure whether your child can safely participate.

10. Discuss mental and emotional health.

If you have concerns about possible symptoms of depression, anxiety, other mental health issues, or substance abuse, share those with the doctor.

11. Talk about information and resources.

If you find information online that you find useful, let the doctor know where you found the information and how you are using it for your child. If you aren't sure how credible the information is, ask the doctor's opinion, so you can factor that in. If you find especially useful information online, leave some printed material from the site with the doctor for future reference.

More Information

The Oregon Family to Family Health Information Center website offers a wealth of information for families of children with health conditions, including Autism Spectrum Disorders. You can find information and resources there on everything from financial matters to community services to recreation to emotional support.

www.oregonfamilytofamily.org

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