

Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) have a hard time in medical settings. It is a good idea to prepare for expected and unexpected visits.



What steps can I take now?

1. Talk with the doctor or medical staff who will care for your child.

- Ask for your child's regular doctor, who knows your child best, when making appointments.
- Identify a staff person from your doctor's office who can answer questions about what to expect. Some clinics and hospitals have a Child Life Specialist. Your Pediatric Developmental Disabilities Office case manager (if you have one) may also be helpful.
- Ask for step-by-step information about what will occur during the visit. Ask for extra help for parts of your visit you know will be hard for your child.
- If possible, ask for an appointment at a time that is best for your child (e.g. avoid nap time!).
- Please bring some fun activities for your child in case there are wait times during your visit.
- Talk to the doctor before the visit:
 - Let them know your child has an Autism Spectrum Disorder.
 - Tell them what might make your child anxious or scared, and what might help your child do better.

2. Complete an "About Me" form for your child: tinyurl.com/aboutme-kp

This form helps your doctors and medical staff understand your child's needs. Keep this form with you!

3. Prepare a "Medical Visit Bag" with items to bring to your child's visit. In case of an unexpected visit, keep this bag in your car. Include these items:

- "About Me" Form
- List of his medications and how they are taken
- Comfort items such as a favorite toy or blanket
- Rewards or reinforcing items, such as tokens or stickers
- Activities to help with wait times.
- Snack and drink for your child. **Please ask before giving your child any food or drink in case it is not recommended by the doctor.**
- Your child's communication system (if he has one), such as PECS or other visual support aids (see "Where can I learn more" on the other side of this page for more information about visual aids).

How can I prepare my child for a visit?

- Help your child understand what will happen. Using words and pictures may help.
- Use social stories (picture stories describing your child's upcoming experience) to prepare your child for the visit. (See vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/asdbloodwork/parent/sstories.php for tips on creating social stories.)
- Talk to your child's Behavioral Health Treatment team, if he has one. They may have good ideas.
- Focus on the pleasant aspects (like a special time afterwards), but be honest about what will happen.

How can I help during the visit?

- Rushing can be stressful to children with ASD. Ask the doctor to go through each step slowly when possible.
- Remain calm and use a quiet voice and warm smile to let your child know she is safe.
- Be honest. Don't say "it won't hurt" if it could hurt. For example, you could describe the feeling of a needle stick as a "strong pinch".
- Explain what is happening in words your child will understand.
- It can help to tell your child that you understand how she is feeling.
- Tell your child that the medical staff are there to help.
- Be positive. Say "You're doing great!" as often as you can.

What should I bring (or not bring) for a hospital visit or outpatient procedure?

- Having another adult with you, if possible, may be helpful to both you and your child. Parents report that having help allows them to focus on the doctor's questions and instructions while a second caregiver helps comfort and care for the child.
- We recommend leaving other children at home when possible. Siblings may want to help, but they could make things more stressful.
- Bring your medical visit bag. (See "Prepare a "Medical Visit Bag" on the other side of this page for a list of what to include.)

Where can I learn more?

Autism Treatment Network "Taking the Work Out of Blood Work: Helping Your Child With ASD":
autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/blood-draw-toolkits

Autism Speaks "Dental Tool Kit":
autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/dental-tool-kit

Autism Treatment Network Visual Supports Toolkit:
autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/visual-supports

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