

How to Have a Successful Dental Visit for Your Child with Autism



Introductions

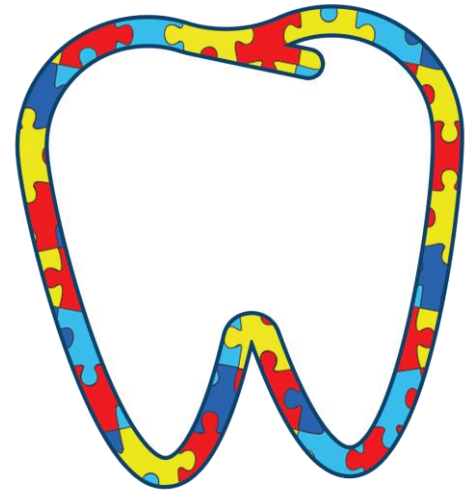
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Flexibility & Adaptability

- Each child with Autism is unique. Even those within the same household.
- Likewise, each dental visit and experience must be unique for each child's needs.
- Dentists, dental staff, and parents must work together to act in the best interest of the child to have a positive experience.
- **COMMUNICATION is KEY**



Why Are Dental Checkups So Important?

Children with autism or special health care needs are more susceptible to caries (cavities) and periodontal (gum) disease.

- Routine brushing/hygiene habits can be difficult
- Dietary concerns
- Bruxism and tongue thrusting
- Challenges for tube-fed children
 - Minimal Caries
 - Excessive calculus (tartar)
 - GERD



Why is Visiting the Dentist So Difficult?

- Stressful for both parent and child.
- Child's perspective
 - Sensory Factors
 - Seekers vs Avoiders
 - Abundance of Stimuli
 - Communication Difficulties
 - Understanding Expectations



Building Healthy Habits at Home

- Keeping up with oral health at home can make dental visits a more positive experience (i.e. less work needed)
- Brushing Basics
 - Twice daily, especially before bed.
 - Toothpaste
 - Flossing if able
 - Try three-sided toothbrushes



Tooth-Healthy Diet & Nutrition

- Minimize the sticky, sugary foods.
 - Juice, soda, sports drinks, fruit snacks, vitamins
- Minimize Carb-Heavy snacks (Goldfish, Pretzels, Chips).
 - Carbs > Sugars > Bacteria > Plaque > Acid > Cavities
- Healthy Snacks
 - Cheeses, Yogurts
 - Fresh Fruits & Veggies
 - Lots of Water



Things to Do Before Appointment Day

- Plan in advance. Discuss your child's unique needs with the staff. **Overcommunicate!**
- Request a private room, if available.
- Request the first appointment of the day or first available appointment after lunch (less people in the office).
- Seek small victories - multiple visits to make the child comfortable and establish a routine.
- Use a visual schedule or social story.

A Visual Schedule for a Visit to the Dentist



We will be visiting the Dentist today to make sure my teeth and mouth are nice, clean, and healthy.



We'll walk into the office and tell our names to the people at the front desk.



Until they call my name, we will play games, color, or watch television.



The hygienist will call my name and walk with me to a room with lots of special chairs.



The special chair will move up and down and lean back so the Dentist can look in my mouth.



When I sit in the chair, I'll keep my hands on my belly and put my legs and feet straight out in front of me.



I'll open my mouth as wide as I can so the Dentist can look inside. There will be a bright light so they can see. I can ask for special sunglasses or close my eyes if it is too bright.



The Dentist will count my teeth with a special mirror. It may tickle a little.



The Dentist will take special pictures of my teeth called X-Rays. I may have to sit down in a different chair and wear a heavy apron to take these pictures.



The Dentist will clean my teeth with special tools. They will show me each one and tell me what they are for before we use them.



When all my teeth are clean I will spit into the sink and rinse with water.



The Dentist will give me a special bag with a new toothbrush and toothpaste. I'll also get a special prize when I leave the office.

Appointment Day

- Remember your plan, but be flexible. It can change on a whim based on your child's mood, feelings, or anxiety.
- Reinforce the social story or visual schedule.
- Tell-Show-Do (if applicable for the child)
 - **Tell** the child what the staff is going to do.
 - **Show** the child how it will be done.
 - **Do** the action.
- Discuss use of protective stabilization (papoose board or weighted vests).

Ongoing Care Options

- If child has good experiences, try more frequent appointments (every three months) to minimize caries risk.
- Discuss sedation or sleep dentistry.
 - Routine cleanings and procedures performed under general anesthesia.
 - Some children benefit from sleep dentistry visits every 2-3 years



Closing Thoughts

- Routine dental visits and healthy habits at home are important for all children.
- While dental visits for children with autism and special needs may be challenging, they are essential to the child's health and development.
- Communication, adaptability, and flexibility are key.
- Actively communicate with your dentist and staff on your child's unique needs.
- Positive visits and healthy routines take time and practice.

Questions & Answers