

# ASD Family Help

Your local Autism Support Charity



## Opticians



## OPTICIANS

Where? <http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Opticians/Wokingham/Results/11/-0.836/51.413/9/24202?distance=25>

How? By  phone &/or  email

When to contact: As soon as you need treatment

How Often? Every 2 years

### Useful Links and Helpful Advice

<http://www.easyhealth.org.uk/content/visit-optician> - This link shows a video of a visit to the Opticians

<http://www.opticianonline.net/Articles/2008/05/23/21091/The+autistic+spectrum+and+eye+examinations.htm>

An eye examination is a stressful situation for anyone but because of the potential for sensory overload care needs to be taken when we examine someone on the autistic spectrum.

### Tips

Produce a visual timetable of what is involved in a routine eye examination. This can be used during play acting before the visit and can be referred to by the child during the appointment. The order of this timetable may at first glance appear confusing. It is important to remember that for the child the experience of an eye examination doesn't end until they have returned home.

Another tool used by some parents to help prepare their child is to write a story about what will happen on the appointment day. This can be read to the child each day and will introduce them to everyone who they will meet at the practice such as the receptionist, dispenser and optometrist. The story should contain photographs of these people. It is also useful to supply photos of the chair they will sit in when they are in the consulting room and any equipment that will be used to help familiarise them with the situation. These stories may seem very simplistic, with a single sentence and photo on each page but are very effective.

Eg:

On Tuesday you are not going to school. You are going to visit \_\_\_\_\_ at the opticians. Mummy will always be with you. \_\_\_\_\_ will talk to you. You might play games and read books.

This will be fun. You will be happy

Mummy will bring some of your favourite toys and books. You can play while mummy talks with \_\_\_\_\_

Visiting the optician is fun!

A pre-appointment visit on a quiet day when the child will not be rushed and there is no unnecessary bustle and noise in the waiting area may be useful to help prepare

them. Allow the child to meet the people they will see on the day, to play with any toys that are available, to sit in the consulting room and perhaps to wear the trial frame or possibly a lighter frame to get them used to the feel of wearing glasses. It may also be possible for a sibling to have an appointment at the same time so that they can watch and perhaps even 'help' during the examination.

Some children may be concerned about how long the examination will take and using a timer will show visually when the examination starts and finishes. It is important to set the timer to slightly longer than the appointment will take to avoid the child being ready to leave before you have finished your examination and explanations.

## **Possible Triggers**

### **Body awareness (proprioception)**

This can lead to people standing too close and invading your body space. It can also cause problems during an examination where the individual is distressed by the proximity of the optometrist. It may also lead to an abnormally high pain threshold and problems. It is also useful to book either the first or last appointment of the day or even a double appointment to avoid waiting, which can increase stress levels.

### **Sensory difficulties**

People with an ASD can experience sensory problems and this can lead to a negative experience during the consultation. These difficulties can be hypo-sensitivity, for instance, trapping their hand in a door and not feeling any pain or hyper-sensitivity screaming in pain when they are tickled.

Excess stimulation can lead to sensory overload and meltdown, this can be as extreme as a tantrum or may cause the person to shut down, not moving, not talking and staring straight ahead. Other responses are for the person to 'stim' (self stimulate) by rocking, flapping or other repetitive actions. These sensory problems are not just related to touch but can affect all the senses.

### **Balance**

The individual may stim by spinning or rocking, others may have problems in positions where the head is not upright, a situation that may be encountered if patients are asked to place their chins on rests, for instance in fields or slit-lamp examination

### **Smell**

Hypo-sensitivity can lead to people not noticing extreme odours or licking things. Hyper-sensitivity can lead to someone with an ASD taking an intense dislike to a person with a distinctive aftershave or perfume

### **Vision**

People with an ASD have reported problems with processing both vision and hearing. It seems to take them longer to process the information and make sense out of it and they need to be allowed extra time to do this.

Other problems include fluorescent lighting which can be uncomfortable and distracting, some people have reported that they are aware of the flicker of individual tubes. It has also been found that 20-30 per cent of people with an ASD are prone to seizures and that a pen light can trigger an attack.

Some people with visual hypo- and hyper-sensitivity may concentrate on the periphery because they report that the centre fragments, while others report that the centre is magnified and the periphery becomes blurred. It is quite common for individuals to concentrate on particular detail rather than the whole. These strategies obviously have implications with some of the tests that we use - peripheral fields and crowded VAs etc

### **Hearing**

The ordinary background noise that we experience in a waiting room can be unbearable for someone who is hyper-sensitive. They may also not be able to filter a particular voice or conversation against a background noise. This may lead them to have problems concentrating on what is being said as they cannot distinguish the voice from noise pollution. Other people may prefer to wear a personal stereo often turned to a volume that we would expect to be uncomfortably loud. Obviously in this situation we will need to use clear visual prompts

### **Touch**

Hyper-sensitivity can lead to not tolerating a trial frame or the touch of the optometrist. The patient should be asked if it is all right to touch them and always warn the patient before they are touched again. Some individuals find that a firm pressure is comforting and may find that being hugged tightly by a parent during a consultation is comforting. Certain textures may also cause problems

<http://www.specsavers.co.uk/ask-the-optician/eye-test-for-autistic-child-with-severe-learning-disability/>

## Eye test for autistic child with severe learning disability

**Question:** I am the social worker for an autistic child with severe speech and language delay and severe learning disability. This young man is at times very hyperactive so it would be difficult for him to sit through an eye test. Could you recommend a way forward

### **Answer:**

**Qualified optometrist Simon Kay BSc(Hons) MCOptom answers this question.**

This can be very challenging, and how far we manage to get would depend on the child. It's surprising what can be checked using very simple tests and observing his eye movements. Reading a chart is certainly not necessary. You could try scheduling his test during times when you think he may be at his calmest. Speak to the practice that you are thinking of taking him too, and ask them if they would be ok testing him, as some practitioners are better than others at dealing with autistic

children. He may in the end need to go for an assessment at the eye clinic in the hospital if necessary.

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Eyecarecosts.aspx>

## **Eye care entitlements**

Some groups of patients are entitled to free NHS sight tests and optical vouchers to help with the cost of glasses or contact lenses.

Patients who are not eligible for NHS sight tests will pay privately for a sight test.

The section below will explain if you are entitled to a free NHS sight test.

### **Am I entitled to free NHS sight test?**

You qualify for a free NHS funded sight test if you are:

- aged under 16, or aged under 19 and in full-time education
- aged 60 or over
- registered blind or partially sighted
- diagnosed with diabetes or glaucoma
- aged 40 or over and you are the parent, brother, sister, son or daughter of a person diagnosed with glaucoma, or you have been advised by an ophthalmologist that you are at risk of glaucoma
- eligible for an NHS complex lens voucher

You are also entitled to a free NHS sight test if:

- you receive Income Support or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (not contribution based)
- you receive Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- you receive Income-based Employment and Support Allowance
- you are awarded Universal Credit
- you are entitled to, or named on, a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate
- you are named on a valid NHS certificate for full help with health costs (HC2)

People named on an NHS certificate for partial help with health costs (HC3) may also get help.

Also read about the [NHS Low Income Scheme \(LIS\)](#).