

## Dental Care Guidance for Caregivers of Patients with Autism

### Common dental problems in patients with Autism

Patients sometimes struggle with oral hygiene, both the dentist and at home, so the proper amount of care can be difficult. For example, periodontal disease and cavities are the two most common dental problems that are often seen.

1. Gingival overgrowth
2. Early & late tooth decay
3. Periodontal gum disease
4. Bruxism
5. Tooth anomalies
6. Inconsistent tooth eruption

### Finding the right dentist

It's important to find a great dentist for your child or loved one with autism. Here are a few questions you can ask when deciding on a dentist that will help you decide who is best for your loved one.

1. *Are you comfortable working with a patient with autism?*

The dentist you choose should be comfortable working with a patient with special needs. Dentists who specialize in special needs care have 2-3 years of extra schooling and will be able to accommodate better for their visit.

2. *What experience do you have working with patients who have autism?*

Listen for specific examples of when a dentist worked with patients with additional needs. Dentist with previous experience will be more comfortable overall in ensuring visit runs smoothly and that your loved one is at ease.

3. *Can any special accommodations be made?*

It is a dentist's goal to make a patient as comfortable as possible. Some accommodations that you may want to request are if you can stay near them throughout their visit, or if they can have a specific flavor of toothpaste. These may seem small but can make a difference in their overall dental experience.

### Dental Sedation

Sedation can be used when a patient is feeling extreme anxiety towards the dentist. It can also be used if someone's health is at risk and they do not want to cooperate. Here are 4 common types of sedation:

- **Inhaled minimal sedation:** Breathing in nitrous oxide combined with oxygen to help relax. Your dentist is in complete control of sedation that is given.
- **Oral sedation:** Can range from minimal to moderate. This type of sedation is most commonly associated with sedation dentistry. The pill makes will make the patient drowsy while a more moderate dose may make the patient fall asleep.
- **IV moderate sedation:** A sedation drug is given through a vein and works more quickly. Your dentist will be able to continually adjust the sedation levels.
- **Deep sedation & general anesthesia:** Medication is given that will make the patient nearly or totally unconscious. While under general anesthesia you cannot easily be awakened until the effects of the medication wear off or are reversed.

### Preparing for the appointment

Preparing for an appointment can give a child an idea of what to expect and help familiarize them with what dental appointments are like.

Here are some ways to prepare for your child's appointment

1. *Find ways to visualize what happens at the dentist*

Stories or videos can give the future patient a way to make a connection between the visual and their dental appointment.

2. *Visit the dentist early*

This is beneficial because it allows patients to familiarize themselves with the environment such as seeing the lights and hearing the sounds. You and your loved one can meet the officers and staff members and go over any accommodations that may need to be made.

### Oral Hygiene at home:

The best oral hygiene habits come from practicing at home. Here are some important habits to start incorporating at home. The best habits to begin at home are brushing twice a day, flossing, and maintaining a healthy diet.

### Medicaid information:

To find a dentist who accepts Medicaid, and for more information contact your state's dental association. If you need help finding your state's dental association you can search for yours on the American Dental Association website.

For more information on caring for a someone with autism visit:

<https://www.emergencydentistsusa.com/autism-and-dental-care/>