

Making the Most of an Eye Exam

Did You Know?

According to *The Health Status and Needs of Individuals with ID*, written in September 2000 and commissioned by Special Olympics International, "Available data suggests that ocular impairments (refractive errors, strabismus, cataracts, keratoconus, nystagmus and poor vision acuity) are more common among individuals with Intellectual Disability (ID) than those without ID."

Have Routine Eye Exams*

Eye Exams should be scheduled once every one to two years.

- Routine eye exams are necessary for everyone whether they have an identified vision impairment or not. Even if someone has total blindness, it is necessary to maintain the health of the eyes and protect from infection or pain. Each individual should be under an active vision care plan and eye examination schedule based on recommendations from an eye specialist (Ophthalmologist or Optometrist).
- Individuals with specific eye conditions may be scheduled for more frequent exams. Follow the guidance of your eye care provider.
- Although an individual may have no visual complaints, there may be an eye condition developing. Some eye diseases can only be detected during a complete eye examination.
- Emergencies: If in between scheduled eye exams any sudden visual problems or changes such as increased floaters, eye pain or pressure, redness, blurred vision or field loss occur, call the eye doctor immediately for an appointment.

Eye Exams (continued)

* **DDS Guidelines for Vision Care**

Eye Examination: ALL, including those with legal or total blindness, should be under an active vision care plan and eye examination schedule based on recommendations from an eye specialist (ophthalmologist or optometrist). Refer to specialist if new ocular signs and/or symptoms develop, including changes in vision/behavior. Annual comprehensive eye exam for patients with diabetes.

Glaucoma Assessment: For individuals aged 19-39: Comprehensive eye exam at least once by age 18-22. Follow up eye exam every 2-3 years, with more frequent eye exams for higher risk patients. For individuals aged 40 or older: Comprehensive eye exam every 1-2 years, with more frequent eye exams for higher risk patients.

Choose an Eye Doctor

Be thorough and careful when choosing an eye care provider. The time spent will be well worth your efforts!

- **An Ophthalmologist:** A doctor of medicine or osteopathy who specializes in the medical and surgical care of the eyes and visual system and the prevention of eye disease and injury and can deliver total eye care (eye examinations, eyeglasses, contact lenses, medicine and surgery), diagnose general diseases of the body and treat ocular manifestations of systemic diseases. (American Academy of Ophthalmology, 1992)
- **An Optometrist:** A health care provider who is licensed to examine the eyes and determine the presence of a vision problem, determine visual acuity, prescribe eyeglasses, contact lenses, and eye exercises. (American Academy of Ophthalmology, 1992)
- **Low Vision Specialist:** An Optometrist or Ophthalmologist who specializes in prescribing optical and nonoptical devices to enhance functional vision.

Ask for recommendations of Optometrists and Ophthalmologists who have experience in working with adults with intellectual/developmental disability (IDD).

Eye Exams (continued)

Select the Best Appointment Day & Time!

Consider several factors when scheduling an appointment as this will help to set the stage for a successful eye exam.

- Describe the reason for the exam to help determine how quickly the appointment is needed.
- Schedule the eye exam on a day when someone who knows the individual well can go along. A supportive companion can help the individual relax and feel as comfortable as possible so that the exam can be completed.
- If waiting is difficult, schedule the appointment to be the first of the day or the first after the doctor's lunch break.

Plan for Success!

Prepare based on individual needs.

- It may be very helpful to talk about the upcoming appointment and explain what will happen as a way to reduce any anxiety about the eye exam. For others, it may be best to inform them on the morning of or just before the exam.
- Prior to the exam, make a list of all questions, concerns and observations of functional vision. Ask the individual and the caregivers who work with the individual in different settings for input.
- Gather important medical information such as medical diagnosis, previous eye reports, medications, allergies, environmental sensitivities, and prior reactions to eye exams.

Get Ready to Go!

- Call ahead on the day of the appointment to see if the doctor is running on time so that you can adjust your arrival time at the office accordingly.
- Take along important information including: medical diagnosis, previous eye reports, medications, allergies, environmental sensitivities, prior reactions to eye exams, functional vision information and questions/concerns.
- Bring any appropriate item or quiet activity that is reinforcing and/or comforting to the individual. This may be helpful to have if there is time to be spent in the waiting room.

Eye Exams (continued)

Special Circumstances

Some individuals have extreme difficulty tolerating eye exams and could potentially go without ever having their eyes thoroughly examined. If this occurs, talk with an eye care provider and the primary care physician to explore alternative approaches to obtaining a thorough eye exam.



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See also MCB/DDS Partnership handouts:

- Common Signs of Vision Loss
- Eye Surgery
- Eyeglasses and Sunglasses

For additional resources, please visit: focusonvisionandvisionloss.org