

MCB/DDS Partnership

Orientation & Mobility/Low Vision Services
www.mass.gov/dds/visionloss



Making the Most of an Eye Exam!*

Did You Know?

According to *The Health Status and Needs of Individuals with ID*, written in Sept. 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 ID than those without ID."

Have Eyes Routinely Examined!

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

- Individuals with specific eye conditions may be scheduled for more frequent exams. Always check with the eye doctor!
- Emergencies: If in between scheduled eye exams, any sudden visual problems, eye pain or pressure occur, call the eye doctor immediately for an appointment.

Choose an Eye Doctor - the First Step for Success!

Be thorough and careful with choosing an Eye Doctor. The time spent will be well worth your efforts!

- Ask for recommendations of Optometrists and Ophthalmologists who have experience in working with adults with developmental disability.

Select the Best Appointment Day & Time!

Take care when scheduling an appointment as this will help to set the stage for creating the most successful atmosphere for the 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, the first after the doctor's lunch break, or the last of the day to reduce waiting time as much as possible.

Making the Most of an Eye Exam (continued)

Plan for Success!

- Prepare the individual based on their 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, the reverse is true and it may be best to inform the person only on the morning of the exam, etc. Whichever approach you use, planning for how the visit will be addressed is an important step to a successful exam.
- Talk with the individual and caregivers about any vision concerns. Make a list of all questions, concerns and observations of functional vision.
- Gather important medical information such as medical diagnosis, previous eye reports, medications, allergies, environmental sensitivities, prior reactions to eye exams, etc.

Get Ready to Go! - "To Do's" on the Day of the Eye Exam:

- 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 all important information including: medical diagnosis, previous eye reports, medications, allergies, environmental sensitivities, prior reactions to eye exams, functional vision information questions/concerns, etc.
- Bring any appropriate item or quiet activity that is reinforcing and/or comforting to the individual. This may be helpful to have along especially if there is time to be spent in the waiting room.

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 the individual's eye doctor and primary care physician to explore alternative approaches to obtaining a thorough eye exam.

Developed by: Lisa DiBonaventura, M.A., COMS

*This article, "Making the Most of an Eye Exam", was first published in the newsletter: *Living Well*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, Spring/Summer, 2004.

Please also see MCB/DDS Partnership handouts:

- Eye Examinations