

What happens during an eye examination?

– information for kids with autism

Recent research has shown that showing videos or photos of the eye examination helps to reduce an autistic child's anxiety, as it allows the child to familiarise themselves with the environment, sounds and staff so it won't be so stressful or scary when they come in. This is why we have included a few photos of our practice and the steps involved in having an eye examination.



Our practice front

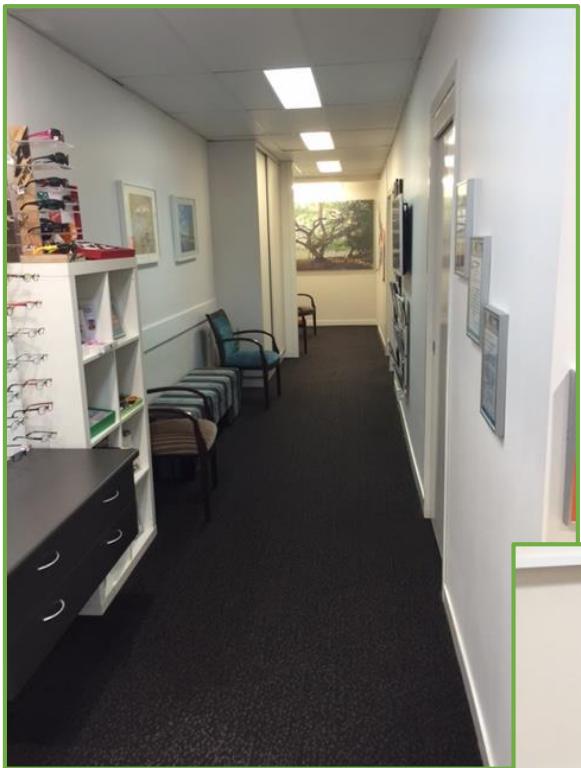


Our reception area

Explanation to your child:

This is where you will have your eyes tested (practice front).

First we have to let the receptionist know that we are here and then we can walk down the corridor to the children's toy area.



Waiting area



Children's toy area



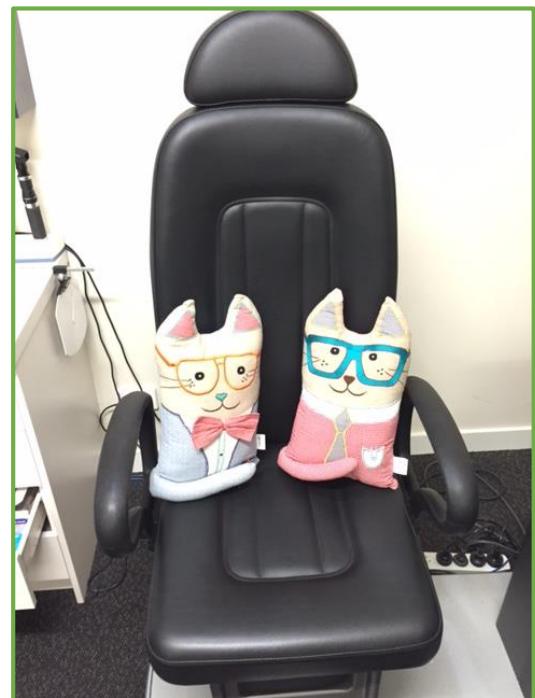
Examination room

Then you get to go into the eye exam room to have your eyes tested.

The first step involves getting you to sit on the important/big/comfortable chair in the room.

You can choose to sit with a “friend” – we have either Chester or Sebastian to sit with you.

The optometrist usually asks you and your mum or dad a few questions about your eyes before we start the eye exam.



Chester and Sebastian

The next step is to check your vision on the chart.

You get to wear a cool pair of glasses or a patch.



Tiger glasses and pirate patches



Cool glasses you get to wear

In fact, you get to wear a lot of cool glasses.

Then you get to look at a TV with some shapes or letters on it.



We don't just use letters on a chart



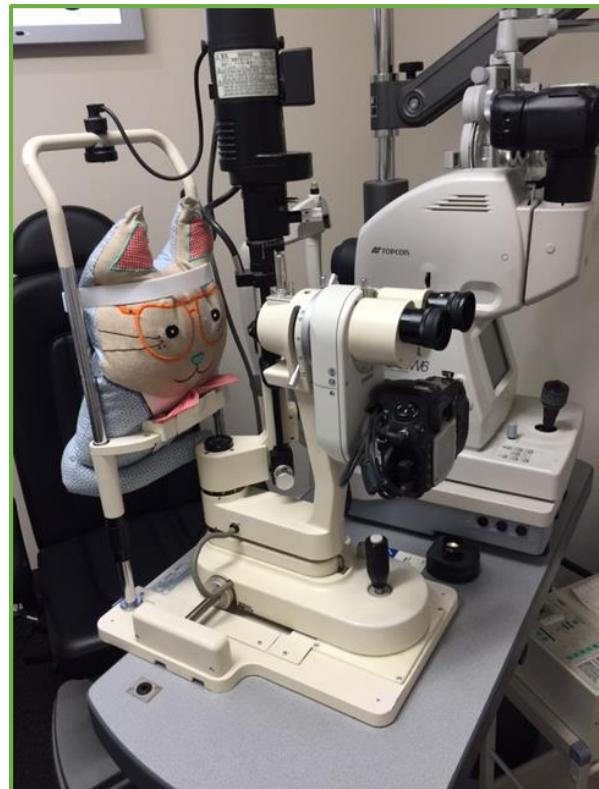
Peppa Pig video

You actually get to watch a video whilst we are checking your eyes and you get to choose from videos such as the Wiggles, Peppa Pig and Frozen.

The last part of the exam involves having a look at your eye health.

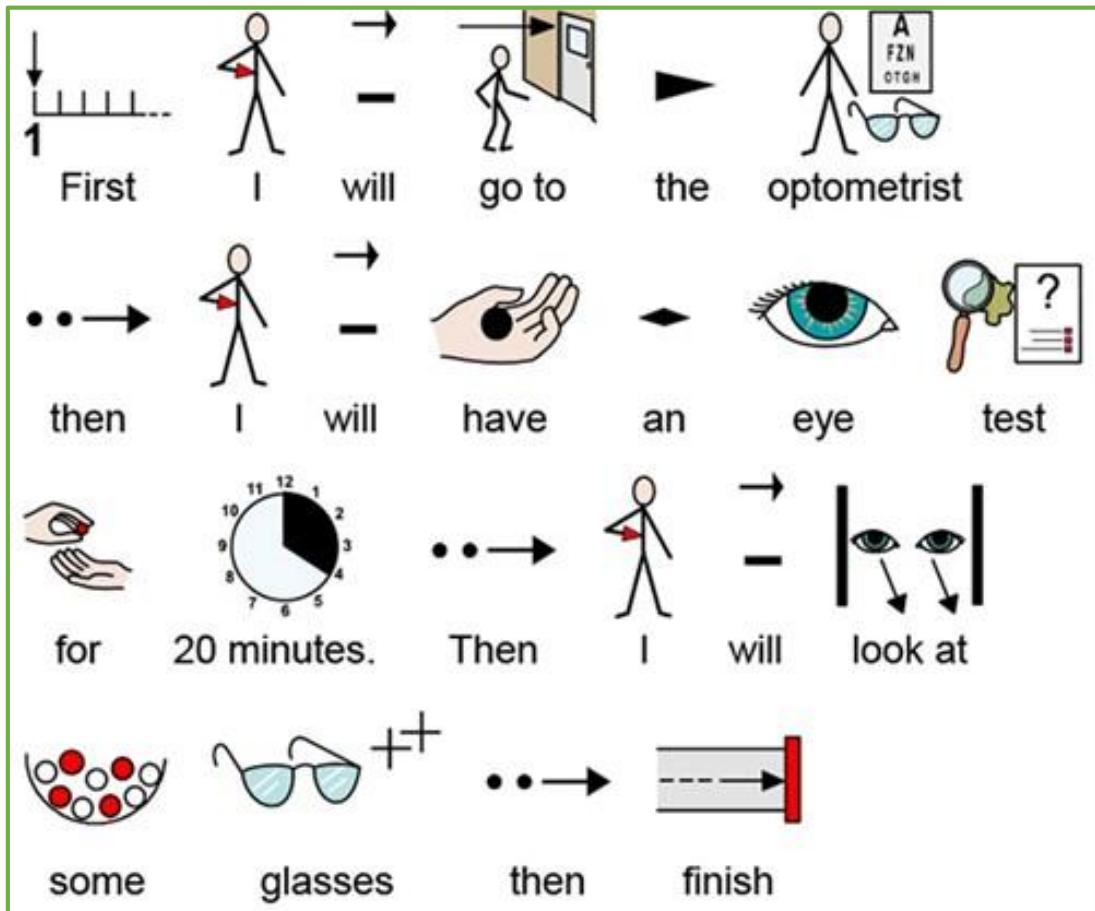
We use a microscope to look at your eyes and we also usually take a photo of the back of your eye so that we can see what is going on inside your eye.

Sometimes, if we want to have a better look at your eyes we may have to put some drops into your eyes and we are more than happy if you want your mum or dad to hold your hand or sit in their lap to make you feel more comfortable.



Chester having his eyes tested

Another useful tool has been a storyboard, which is a visual time-table storyboard that tells the story in pictures of an eye test. This helps patients prepare for the consultation by showing what to expect.



Senior lecturer, optometrist Dr Paul Constable is the head of the autism optometric speciality clinic at Flinders University. With his vast experience, he offers some tips below when it comes to testing the eyes of a child with autism.

Dr Paul Constable's top 10 tips for optometrists treating patients with ASD

- 1. Letting the child familiarise themselves with the room and space will facilitate the test. The first visit may simply be dedicated to letting the child get to know what will happen. On subsequent visits you will be able to achieve a little more each time. Be prepared for multiple visits to complete an examination.**
- 2. Time. Everything takes longer with a child on the spectrum, to process information, to make a response, to understand the process of the test.**
- 3. Gain the attention of the child and establish an understanding of what is required of them. Make direct eye-contact to ensure they are focusing on what you are saying. Being 'eye to eye' will help the child hold their attention on you. Physically holding their hand can also help draw their attention to you.**
- 4. Listen and involve the parent or carer who will have strategies (words, gestures) to guide the child's attention and actions.**
- 5. Talk slowly and in short, simple, direct sentences. For example, 'First sitting, then looking' or 'First eye one then eye two.' The 'First X then Y' is a strategy used by speech pathologists to develop communication so this syntax is often understood by the child.**
- 6. Talk to the parent or carer about what interests their child. It may be numbers, shapes or colours that can then lead the eye test. Parents or carers can often facilitate routine tests such as ocular motility and help establish vision using Cardiff or Kay picture cards. If the child likes to count, then ask them to count 'red' spots on the Ishihara plates rather than telling you the number.**
- 7. Take turns when doing tests. 'First Mummy glasses on, then you.'**
- 8. Be clear about how long the test will take and when it will end. A countdown clock in the room helps. The child will be reassured if they can see how many minutes remain and that there will be a clear end point.**
- 9. A quiet, calm, uncluttered consulting room will help maintain the child's attention on one thing at a time.**
- 10. Be sure both parent and child understand the need and effects of eye-drops. Eye-drops for refraction induce blur for two to three hours, are painful and to any child, cause distress. It is vital that this is understood by the child and may require the use of visual aids to illustrate what will happen.**