DOWN'S SYNDROME ASSOCIATION

Supporting a Person who has Down's Syndrome During an Eye Examination

April 2026



A Down's Syndrome Association publication

Top Tips from Professor Maggie Woodhouse for Supporting a Person who has Down's syndrome During an Eye Examination



Professor Maggie Woodhouse

Ask friends, members of support groups etc, to recommend a local optometrist that has experience of people who have Down's syndrome. The DSA has a list that might be helpful and SeeAbility has a searchable 'Find an Optometrist' database at their website: Find an optometrist | SeeAbility. Be prepared to travel - it will be worth it.

If the person you are supporting is particularly anxious, ask if you can visit the practice beforehand to familiarise them with the environment and meet the staff. Some practices will provide photographs. Ask for the names of staff that you will meet.

To cut down time taking 'history and symptoms', and avoid the person getting bored, it can be useful to provide written information in advance. This will include eye care and medical history, current medication if any, and important likes and dislikes. If the person has any particular aversions (such as fear of the dark) let staff know beforehand.

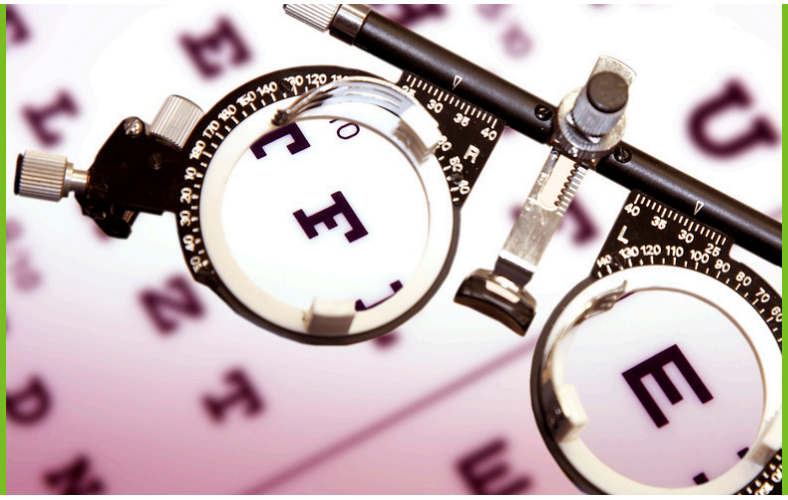
If the person you are supporting is not used to eye examinations, talk through what will happen at home. SeeAbility has a document that you can download from their website

seeability.org/resources/having-eye-test-easy-read.



Practice parts of the eye exam: shine a torch around in the dark; look at eyes in a mirror; shine a (DIM!) torch into eyes; look through a magnifying glass, cover each eye in turn; peer through a cardboard tube or hole in cardboard; name pictures from a distance.

On the day, it is important that staff speak to the person, not just to you. Even if the person cannot speak, ask staff to talk to them.



Remember the optometrist is the expert on eyes, but you are the expert on the person!

In the testing room, if there is space, ask to sit close to your family member/client. You are there to support them, and you cannot do that if you are seated in a corner behind the optometrist's back.

During the examination, don't be afraid to speak up to help the person you are there to support. You know the words that they understand. For example, the optometrist might ask them to 'match the picture'; you may know that 'find the same picture' is a better way to say it.

Similarly, if you think the person doesn't understand what is happening, or what questions mean, speak up and offer suggestions. Remember the optometrist is the expert on eyes, but you are the expert on the person!

Optometrists often follow a routine with typical patients and move through the process quickly. That rarely suits people who have Down's syndrome, who need time to process. Speak up if you think the optometrist is rushing the person and explain that they need more time.



At the end of the examination, make sure that you understand exactly what the optometrist found: whether the person needs spectacles and what for; when spectacles should be worn; how well the person can see; what additional support they might need, when the next appointment should be. If at all possible, the optometrist should give you this information in writing so that you can share it with others involved.

Finally, if the examination is successful, heap praise on the staff and ask if you can recommend them to other families. Spread the word!

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