

Supporting Your Child Through Medical Procedures

A Parent's Guide from Autism Roadmaps

Medical procedures—whether it's a dental cleaning, an endoscopy, or any procedure requiring anesthesia—can be particularly challenging for autistic children and their families. We understand the anxiety, planning, and care these situations require.

This guide brings together strategies from our community's collective wisdom, including personal experiences. You know your child best, and these suggestions can be adapted to suit their unique needs and sensitivities.

Before The Procedure: Preparation Is Key



Creating Visual Supports

Visual schedules can significantly reduce anxiety about the unknown:

- Create a simple visual timeline showing each step of the process
- Include pictures of the facility, waiting room, and procedure room if possible
- Consider making a social story that walks through the entire experience
- Add approximate times for each stage so your child knows what to expect



Community Tip:

"Creating a visual schedule with pictures of the hospital, the waiting room, and the procedure room helped reduce my child's anxiety about the unknown."



Facility Preparation

When possible, familiarize your child with the medical environment:

- Arrange a pre-visit to the facility where they can see the rooms and meet some staff
- Ask if virtual tours or videos of the facility are available
- Request a quiet waiting area in advance
- Discuss with staff where you'll be reunited after the procedure

Before the Procedure (continued...)

✓ Communication with Medical Team

Open communication with healthcare providers is crucial:

- Make a small card listing your child's specific triggers and calming techniques
- Schedule a pre-procedure call with the medical team to discuss accommodations
- Be direct about your child's needs — you are their best advocate
- Ask if procedures can be scheduled during your child's optimal time of day

Community Tip:

"I found that talking directly to the anesthesiologist and gastroenterologist about specific accommodations was a huge help for our son's endoscopy."



✓ Comfort Items and Sensory Considerations

Essential Items to Bring

Consider bringing these items to help your child feel more secure:

- A highly preferred object or comfort item (laptop or tablet, plushie, fidget)
- Noise-canceling headphones for pre-procedure waiting
- Familiar music, videos, or games on a device
- A weighted blanket or compression clothing if helpful
- Sunglasses if sensitive to bright lights

Sensory Accommodations to Request

Don't hesitate to ask for these accommodations:

- Dimmed lights in the procedure and recovery rooms
- Minimal staff present during induction
- Quiet recovery space
- Permission to keep a comfort item until the last possible moment
- Gradual introduction to medical equipment



During the Procedure: Strategies for You

Anesthesia Considerations:

If your child requires anesthesia:

- Discuss with the anesthesiologist how induction will work (mask vs. IV)
- Ask if they can start with oxygen nearby rather than directly on the face
- Request step-by-step explanations using clear, direct language
- Consider whether technology (videos/music) could help with distraction
- Ask if pre-medication options are available to reduce anxiety



Community Tip:

"The anesthesiologist was able to put some oxygen not too close to the face but enough so he got sleepy and then was able to put the full mask on. This gradual approach made all the difference."

Supporting Through Transitions

Transitions between stages of the procedure can be especially difficult:

- Request to stay with your child until they're under anesthesia if possible
- Clearly explain when you'll be separated and when you'll reunite
- Use simple, concrete language about what will happen
- Reassure them that you'll be waiting when they wake up
- Consider a written note they can keep with them
- Create a small transition kit with a photo of you and a comfort item
- Practice transition phrases at home before the procedure day
- If helpful, use a visual timer if waiting periods are involved
- Create "first-then" visuals (first procedure, then preferred activity)
- Ask if your child can wear their own clothes for as long as possible
- Bring familiar scents (like a favorite lotion or chapstick)
- Consider recording your voice for them to listen to during separation
- Develop a special "secret signal" or gesture that means "everything is okay"
- Request a consistent "transition person" (same nurse or staff member) throughout the process

After the Procedure: Recovery Support

Coming Out of Anesthesia

Waking up from anesthesia can be disorienting and frightening:

- Ask to be present in the recovery room when they wake up
- Request a quiet recovery area with minimal stimulation
- Bring their comfort item to have ready when they wake
- Use calm, reassuring language and remind them where they are
- Give them time to fully regain awareness before attempting to move

Going Home and Processing

The experience doesn't end at discharge:

- Have a clear plan for getting home comfortably
- Consider bringing sunglasses, noise-canceling headphones, or a blanket for the car ride
- Allow extra downtime for processing the experience
- Consider creating a social story about what happened to review together
- Celebrate their bravery with a predetermined reward or special activity

Medication Considerations

Working with Healthcare Providers

Medication can sometimes help manage procedure-related anxiety:

- Consult with your child's psychiatrist or primary care provider about anxiety medication options
- Ask if pre-procedure medications can be given at home or in a calm setting
- Discuss the best timing for any medication (day before, morning of, etc.)
- Consider asking for pill or liquid form medications depending on preferences
- Remember that medication is just one tool in your toolkit

Important Note:

For specific medication recommendations, please consult with your child's healthcare provider. Members are welcome to ask questions in our community and tag Dr. Rubin for guidance.



Learning from Each Experience

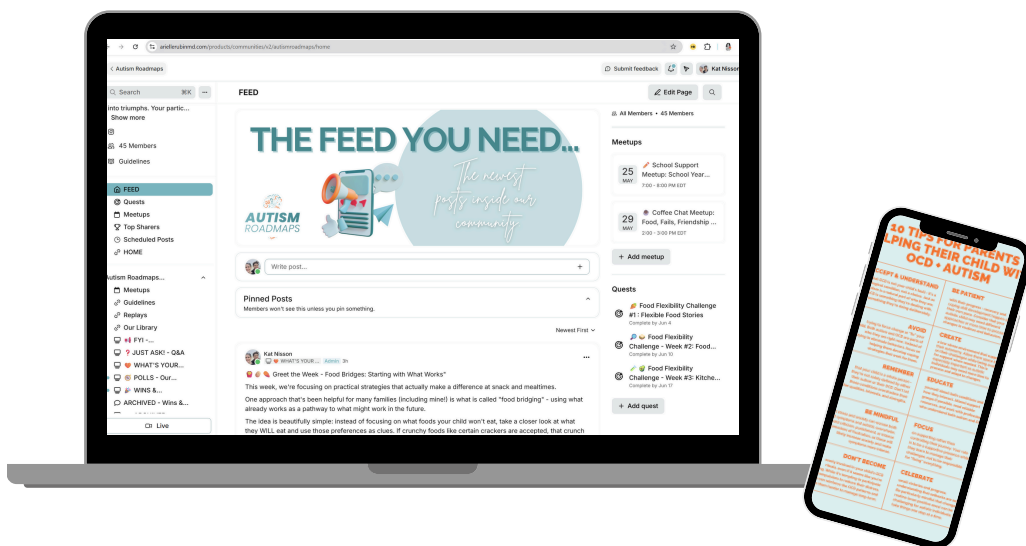
Every medical procedure provides an opportunity to learn what works for your child:

- Keep notes on what helped and what didn't
- Share successful strategies with your child's healthcare team for future reference
- Consider debriefing with your child when they're ready, using a format that works for them
- What works may change as your child grows and develops

Community Support

Remember, you're not alone in this journey:

- Share your experiences and questions in our Autism Roadmaps Community. Not yet a member? Visit ariellerubinmd.com/community
- Tag Dr. Rubin for specific medical guidance
- Check our Resource Library for additional materials on medical procedures, anxiety management, specific diagnoses, supplements, medications and sensory support
- Connect with other parents who have navigated similar experiences



Final Thoughts

Medical procedures are challenging for most children, but with thoughtful preparation and advocacy, you can make these experiences more manageable for your child.

Trust your instincts as a parent — you know your child best. The strategies that worked for one child may need adaptation for your child, but the principle remains the same: preparation, communication, and compassionate support make all the difference!

Wishing you and your child the best,
Dr. Arielle Rubin and the Autism Roadmaps Community

Arielle Rubin

Questions?

Drop them in the community so we can continue the discussion!



AUTISM
ROADMAPS



For more support:

 drarielle@ariellerubinmd.com

 www.ariellerubinmd.com

 [@ariellerubinmd](https://www.instagram.com/ariellerubinmd)