

## Vision Therapy for Patients with Autism, PDD, Aspergers, or Autism Spectrum Disorders



### April is Autism Awareness Month

*Has your child been diagnosed with autism or with an autism spectrum disorder?*

*Does your child have Asperger's?*

*Does your child have PDD?*

*Does your child have sensory integration issues?*

Although vision problems are common with autism, they are often overlooked. Often, autistic behaviors, such as: poor eye contact, looking through or beyond objects, extreme aversion to light, unusual reaction to visual stimuli are visual disorders which can be treated through individually designed and applied vision therapy.

### How can vision therapy benefit a child or adult who has autism or an autism spectrum disorder?

If your child has a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, they should have a comprehensive vision evaluation with a developmental optometrist. It is not necessary for a patient to be verbal to have a vision evaluation with an eye doctor at The Solution Center. Our doctors and therapists are very experienced in evaluating and treating patients with autism.

Our doctors and therapists work with each individual patient on improving issues which are causing difficulties. Each patient's therapy is specifically designed to treat his/her issues and treatment is adjusted periodically based on improvement and needs. Many patients with autism spectrum disorders have difficulty with:

- eye/hand coordination
- fine motor skills
- large motor skills
- eye contact
- sensitivity to light
- impulse control
- understanding one's physical place within an area
- depth perception

Many of these symptoms can be caused by undiagnosed vision issues such as eye teaming disorders, strabismus, or other visual/perception disorders. These disorders are not screened for during vision screenings at school and at the pediatrician's office.

According to Dr. Grandin in her book, “Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism,” “In many autistic children, the eye itself is normal but faulty wiring in the brain is causing the problem.” Vision therapy helps to “retrain” the brain.

Through vision therapy many sensory issues that are common with autistic patients can be addressed. Vision therapy is effective in helping autistic patients who have disorders such as poor depth perception, poor eye-hand coordination, lack of awareness of one’s physical place within an area, and poor eye contact.

At The Solution Center, we work with each patient to determine their needs and goals and then we come up with an individualized course of treatment.

If you would like to find out more, please send us an email or call our Westerville, Ohio office at 614-410-5018.

**The following article is from COVID, the College of Optometrists in Vision Development.**

### **VISION AND AUTISM**

Autism is a neurobiological disorder that is described as a behavioral syndrome. Individuals with autism have difficulty with processing and responding to information from their senses, and with communication and social interaction. Vision problems are very common in individuals with autism. Symptoms of autism may include visual components such as lack of eye contact, staring at light or spinning objects, fleeting peripheral glances, side viewing and difficulty attending visually. Other symptoms of autism include lack of reciprocal social interaction, delays in development and a hypo or hyper-response to sensory information. Symptoms appear over time as the child shows a pattern of developmental problems.

Some persons with autism use visual information inefficiently. They have problems coordinating their central and side vision. When asked to follow an object with their eyes, they usually do not look at it directly. They scan or look off to the side at the object. These individuals may have difficulty maintaining visual attention. Eye movement disorders and strabismus are also common.

Many persons with autism are tactually or visually defensive. Tactually defensive persons are over stimulated by input through touch. They are always moving and wiggling. They avoid contact with texture. Visually defensive persons avoid contact with specific visual input and may have hypersensitive vision. They have difficulty with visually “holding still” and frequently rely on a constant scanning of visual information in an attempt to gain meaning.

As a result of poor integration of central and peripheral visual input, individuals with autism may have difficulty processing information. Once central focus is gained, they ignore side vision and remain fixated on a task for excessive periods. Since the visual system relates to motor, cognitive, speech, and perceptual abilities, these areas may also be affected when the visual processing is interrupted.

The vision evaluation of persons with autism varies depending on their developmental, emotional and physical level. After a thorough patient history, a comprehensive vision examination is attempted. The examination includes but is not limited to, an evaluation of: visual acuity, eye tracking and fixations, depth perception, color vision, eye teaming and focusing, the presence of nearsightedness, farsightedness and /or astigmatism, eye health and visual fields.

Testing may also be performed using lenses and/or yoked prisms while the patient does specific activities such as walking, ball catching and throwing. Observation of postural adaptations and compensations while the patient is sitting, walking and standing with and without the lenses and prisms is often conducted.

Depending on the results of testing, lenses to compensate for nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism, with or without yoked prism may be prescribed. A progress examination may be scheduled in three to five weeks to evaluate subjective changes and to repeat portions of the vision examination as needed. A consultation may also be scheduled to discuss the benefits of vision therapy. Vision therapy activities are used to stimulate general visual arousal, eye movement and the central visual system. The goals of the treatment program using lenses, prisms and vision therapy are to help the individual organize visual space and gain peripheral stability so that he or she can better attend to and appreciate central vision. In addition, treatment is directed at gaining efficient eye teaming and visual information processing.

Treatment programs are coordinated with the patient's primary care physician and others who may be participating in the multidisciplinary management of the patient.

Members of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) are optometrists who specialize in examining children and adults with developmental disabilities, including autism. Fellows of the College are certified in the diagnosis and treatment of learning related vision problems. For further information, contact COVD or consult with a COVD member optometrist.

*This informational paper was produced by the College of Optometrists in Vision Development, which board certifies qualified optometric physicians in vision therapy.*