

MEET



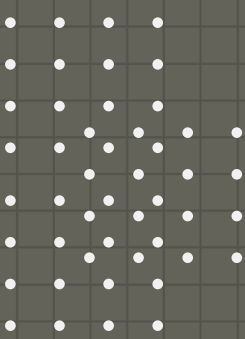
JOHN MITCHELL

PENNSYLVANIA

**38 YEARS
OLD**

**BOWLING
BASKETBALL**

**JOHN MITCHELL : THE QUEST FOR
UNDERSTANDING AND SPECIALIZED
DENTAL CARE.**



John is a 38-year-old man with Asperger's syndrome who navigates life's challenges by focusing on his strengths and personal interests. While his disability sometimes makes it harder to communicate his needs or adapt into new environments, John's days are filled with meaningful activities. He works part-time at a nearby convenience store, where he takes pride in his work and his punctuality in showing up. He has been involved in the Special Olympics for over a decade where he enjoys playing both bowling and basketball. He also once served on local athlete leadership committees where he voiced the experiences of participants like him.

John's relationship with the health system shows how a "one-size-fits-all" approach often doesn't work for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Although he lives in a big city, finding providers who truly understand his needs has always been hard. What John looks for is an environment that treats him as a whole person, offering extra time for explanations, a quieter waiting room, or simple reassurance before a procedure.

When John visits his primary care doctor, short appointments often leave him feeling rushed and anxious. He does and feels best when the doctor takes time to explain things step by step while stopping and checking if he understands. A calm and simple approach helps John feel more confident, respected, and willing to follow medical advice.

Dental care is another key area where John faces challenges. John finds standard dental settings with bright lights, unfamiliar tools, and loud equipment overwhelming. He often needs sedation dentistry to stay comfortable. However, finding a dentist who offers this accommodation and accepts his insurance isn't always easy. Most of the time, John and his caregivers have to spend hours researching, calling, and traveling to find someone who meets his needs. In an ideal system, this wouldn't be such a struggle. Dentists trained in working with people with IDD would be easier to find, and insurance policies would better support these necessary services.





John's mother and support staff, like those from JEVS, play an important role in assisting him in daily activities when needed. They help him organize appointments, understand medical instructions, and navigate with new or intimidating situations. Still, much of the responsibility rests on John and his family, rather than on a health system that isn't built to accommodate these needs from the start.

John wants healthcare providers, policymakers, and the community to remember that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) deserve the same respect, understanding, and quality care as everyone else. He wants people in power to know that simply providing medical services isn't enough. Clinicians need to communicate clearly, listen carefully, and adapt their approach to meet patients' needs. When doctors take the time to slow down, simplify explanations, and show genuine care, it greatly improves how someone like John experiences the healthcare system.

John also urges policymakers to consider what it means for people with IDD to access specialized care, like sedation dentistry, and to ensure that these accommodations aren't seen as "extras" but as necessary parts of equal healthcare. He hopes insurance companies and regulators will focus on funding and policies that make care more accessible and supportive for people with IDD.

For the wider community, John's message is about empathy. He wants people to understand that when someone struggles at a clinic or needs extra help, it's not because they're less capable but they may simply just need more time, clearer instructions, or a quieter environment. By recognizing and respecting these differences, everyone can help create a world where people with IDD don't have to fight so hard to receive the care they need. His ultimate wish is that empathy and flexibility become the norm, so that every person feels comfortable and valued when seeking healthcare.