

Smilematters

PATIENT FACT SHEET

Be a Good Sport About Mouthguards

You may not realize that the most-injured area of the body during contact sports is the mouth. Dental injuries can be permanent, painful and costly. The good news is that injuries can be prevented or minimized by wearing a mouthguard.

A mouthguard covers the upper teeth and helps to prevent injuries to the teeth, lips, cheeks, tongue and jaw. Of course, the helmet or headgear required for the sport or activity should also be worn, as it protects against injuries to the head and neck.

While there are three kinds of mouthguards available, you should talk to your dentist about which one will provide the most protection for you or your child.

- Stock or ready-made mouthguards are the least expensive and can be bought at most sports stores. They are pre-formed and ready to wear. Unfortunately, they often don't fit very well. Many athletes complain that they make it difficult to breathe and speak and are too bulky, loose or uncomfortable.
- Boil and bite mouthguards also can be bought at most sporting goods stores and may offer a better fit than stock mouthguards. These guards are molded to fit your mouth by boiling the mouthguard in water and then biting into the warm plastic.
- Custom-fitted mouthguards are individually designed and constructed for you by your dentist. While they are a bit more expensive than other types, they have a custom fit and are more comfortable and do not interfere with speech or breathing.

It is a good idea to rinse your mouthguard under cold water after each use and to

occasionally clean it with soap and cool water. Like your other sports gear, mouthguards can tear or wear out, so they should be replaced after each sports season.

Talk to your dentist about the right mouthguard for you. Your dentist or orthodontist may suggest that you use a mouthguard on the lower teeth if you have braces. If you have a retainer or other removable appliance, don't wear it during any contact sport.

It's important to wear a mouthguard if there's any chance that you may run into other players or fall on a hard surface. Whether you're playing hockey, football, basketball or soccer, or taking part in recreational sports such as skateboarding, inline skating or bicycling, you should wear a mouthguard. More than 5,000,000 teeth are knocked out each year during sports activities. However, the majority of these injuries are preventable — with the proper use of a mouthguard!

In Summary

- It is important to wear a mouthguard that is fitted properly to help prevent injuries to your teeth, lips, cheeks, tongue and jaw.
- Talk to your dentist about which one of the three kinds of mouthguards is right for you: ready-made, boil and bite, or custom-fitted.
- Be sure to wear your mouthguard during practice as well as during games.