

The importance of using mouthguards

Tips for keeping your smile safe

Have you ever thought about how it would feel if you lost one or two of your front teeth? You probably wouldn't smile much. Face-to-face conversations would be uncomfortable. It wouldn't be easy pronouncing certain words. And how about chewing pizza or an apple? Until your teeth are gone, you might not miss them.

Teens and adult weekend warriors experience thousands of injuries each year on the playing field, on the basketball court, while biking or skating, and during other activities. Injuries to the face in nearly every sport can harm your teeth, lips, cheeks and tongue.

A properly fitted mouthguard, or mouth protector, is an important piece of athletic gear that can protect your teeth and smile. You may have seen them used in contact sports, such as football, boxing, ice hockey, lacrosse and women's field hockey.

Mouthguards help protect teeth even in noncontact sports, such as gymnastics. Many experts recommend that a mouthguard be worn for any recreational activity that poses a risk of injury to the mouth.

CHOOSING A MOUTHGUARD

There are three types of mouthguards:

- the ready-made, or stock, mouthguard;
- the mouth-formed "boil-and-bite" mouthguard;
- the custom-made mouthguard made by a dentist.

All properly fitted mouthguards provide varying degrees of protection. A custom-fitted mouthguard professionally made in the dental office can be tailored to the demands of the athlete and the sport.

The most effective mouthguard should have several features. It should be resilient, tear-resistant and comfortable. It also should fit properly, be durable and easy to clean, and not restrict your speech or breathing.

A mouthguard strap can be fastened to most types of mouthguards. The strap protects against loss and allows the mouthguard to be suspended from a face mask when the athlete is not in play.

Generally, a mouthguard covers only the upper teeth. If you have a protruding jaw, your dentist may recommend that your lower teeth also be covered.

If you participate in any of the activities listed in the box, the American Dental Association and the Interna-

tional Academy for Sports Dentistry recommend that you wear a properly fitted mouthguard.

These sports have the potential to seriously harm the head, face or mouth as a result of head-to-head contact, hazardous falls, tooth clenching or blows to the mouth. A well-made, properly fitted mouthguard can be used for any of these sports.

CARING FOR YOUR MOUTHGUARD

Before and after each use, rinse the mouthguard with cold water or with an antiseptic mouth rinse. You can

BOX

SPORTS FOR WHICH YOU MAY NEED A MOUTHGUARD.

If you participate in these or other sports, consult your dentist about getting a mouthguard.

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| ■ Acrobatics | ■ Racquetball |
| ■ Basketball | ■ Rugby |
| ■ Bicycling | ■ Shotputting |
| ■ Boxing | ■ Skateboarding |
| ■ Equestrian events | ■ Skiing |
| ■ Extreme sports | ■ Skydiving |
| ■ Field events | ■ Soccer |
| ■ Field hockey | ■ Softball |
| ■ Football | ■ Squash |
| ■ Gymnastics | ■ Surfing |
| ■ Handball | ■ Volleyball |
| ■ Ice hockey | ■ Water polo |
| ■ Inline skating | ■ Weightlifting |
| ■ Lacrosse | ■ Wrestling |
| ■ Martial arts | |

clean it with toothpaste and a toothbrush, too. When it's not being used, place your mouthguard in a firm, perforated container. This permits air circulation and helps prevent damage. Avoid high temperatures from sources such as hot water, hot surfaces or direct sunlight, which can distort the mouthguard.

Check it for tears and holes and to see whether it has become loose. A mouthguard that is torn or in bad shape can irritate your mouth and lessen the amount of protection it provides. Have regular dental checkups and bring your mouthguard along so the dentist can make sure it's still in good condition.

For more information, visit "www.ada.org/public/topics/mouthguards.asp" and "www.sportsdentistry-iasd.org". ■

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