

Sports Mouthguards

Mouthguards help to minimize the risk of injury to the face, teeth, jaw and head when involved in active or contact sports. Dental injuries can occur at any age. About one-third of these injuries occur during active recreation/leisure activities, such as cycling, skateboarding and riding a scooter, and during organized sports, including football, basketball, baseball, hockey and soccer. Mouthguards are recommended for anyone engaging in aggressive activities or when practising or competing in sports.

RISK FACTORS

Dental injuries can be painful, disfiguring and expensive to treat. Injuries can include cuts to the lips, gums, cheeks, tongue and face, as well as chipped or broken teeth, knocked out teeth and broken jaw. Such injuries can result in time away from school or work, lengthy treatment and long-term physical and monetary costs.

People with protrusive front teeth, inadequate lip coverage over their teeth or have orthodontic appliances are often at greater risk of dental injury.

TREATING INJURIES

In the event of an injury affecting teeth or jaw, see a dental professional immediately. If any teeth have been dislodged, gently hold them in place and go to the dentist, or transport them in cold milk or sterile saline solution. Do not wrap them in tissue or gauze. Seek medical treatment promptly if the injury causes loss of consciousness.

PREVENTING INJURIES

Mouthguards have been shown to reduce trauma not only to teeth, gums, and the surrounding jawbone, but also to reduce injury to the temporomandibular joints (TMJ) and to reduce the intensity and number of head concussions. Mouthguards also reduce the pressure and bone deformation of the skull when a force is directed to the chin.

FEATURES OF A PROTECTIVE MOUTHGUARD

Mouthguards are flexible, plastic appliances that fit over the teeth. Some of the important features include:

- Comfortable but tight fit within the mouth
- Allows normal breathing and swallowing
- Correct thickness over the teeth to provide protection against impact
- Odourless and tasteless

As professional healthcare providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated healthcare professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

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TYPES OF MOUTHGUARDS

1. **Custom-fitted mouthguards**, which are created from an impression of the person's teeth and gums, are considered to provide the best protection due to their close fit, comfort and cushioning (shock absorption) effect. They are custom made by a dental professional at a mouthguard clinic or at a dental hygiene or dental clinic. A well-fitting custom mouthguard is comfortable and will not interfere with breathing and swallowing.
2. **Boil and bite mouthguards** can be purchased in pharmacies and sports supply stores and molded at home. The material is softened in boiling water and then formed directly on the upper teeth. Store-bought mouthguards are less expensive than custom-made ones. However, they can be uncomfortable if not properly fitted, and provide limited protection.
3. **Stock or ready-to-wear mouthguards** are also sold in sporting stores. They come pre-formed and are the least expensive type of mouthguard, but they also provide the least amount of protection, fit and comfort. They may interfere with breathing and swallowing.

MAINTENANCE AND CARE

- Clean the mouthguard after each use with mild soap or mouthwash and a soft toothbrush to remove bacteria and plaque. Rinse under cold water after cleaning and air-dry.
- Store in a ventilated, rigid container.
- Keep away from heat and direct sunlight.
- Do not chew on or alter the mouthguard, as it will affect the fit and cause it to be less protective.
- Do not share mouthguards.
- Mouthguards become less effective over time and should be replaced when they tear or become too loose or too thin.
- Replace mouthguards at least every year and as needed.
- Clients should bring their mouthguards for assessment at each dental appointment.