

Protecting teeth with mouthguards

Knowing how to prevent injuries is important if you participate in organized sports or other recreational activities. When it comes to protecting your mouth, a mouthguard is an essential piece of athletic gear that should be part of an athlete's standard equipment from an early age. In fact, an athlete is 60 times more likely to suffer harm to the teeth when not wearing a mouthguard. Mouthguards help buffer an impact or blow that otherwise could cause broken teeth, jaw injuries or cuts to the lip, tongue or face. Mouthguards also may reduce the rate and severity of concussions.

Mouthguards are used most commonly in contact sports, such as boxing, football, hockey and lacrosse, but findings show that even in noncontact sports like basketball, gymnastics or skateboarding, mouthguards help prevent mouth and jaw injuries.

There are three types of mouthguards: the ready-made, or stock, mouthguard; the mouth-formed "boil-and-bite" mouthguard; and the custom mouthguard made by a dentist.

Choose a mouthguard that

- is resilient and tear-resistant;
- fits properly and is comfortable;
- is easy to clean;
- does not restrict speech or breathing.

Your dentist can make a custom mouthguard for you or your child that is comfortable and offers superior protection. Because treating a sports-related dental injury can cost thousands of dollars, a custom mouthguard is a worthwhile investment. While custom mouthguards are considered by many to be the most protective option, patients for whom a custom mouthguard is not feasible (for example, because of cost) should discuss other types of mouthguards with their dentist.

TAKE CARE OF THE MOUTHGUARD

Patients need to take care of their mouthguards by doing the following:

- rinse before and after each use or brush with a toothbrush and toothpaste;
- occasionally clean the mouthguard in cool,

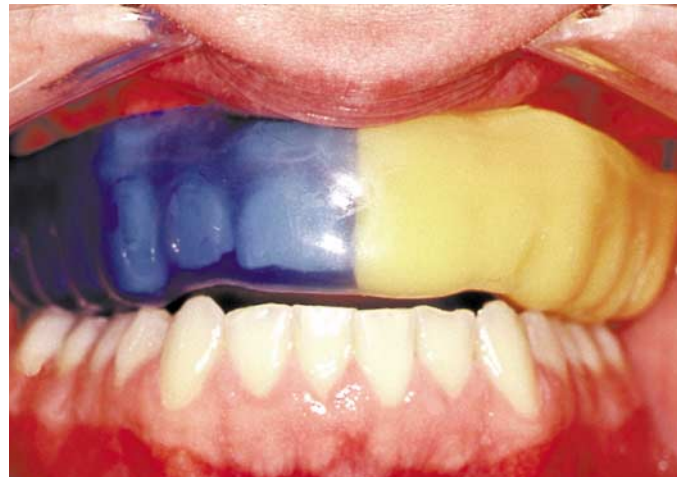


Figure. A custom mouthguard made by a dentist.

soapy water and rinse thoroughly;

- transport the mouthguard in a sturdy container that has vents;
- make sure not to leave the mouthguard in the sun or in hot water;
- check for wear and replace the mouthguard when necessary.

GET THE MOST FROM A MOUTHGUARD

To get the best service from a mouthguard, you should

- not wear removable appliances, such as retainers, with a mouthguard;
- wear a custom-fitted mouthguard if you wear braces or have a protruding jaw, receding chin or cleft palate;
- not chew on or cut pieces off your mouthguard;
- wear the mouthguard during practice sessions as well as during games;
- schedule regular dental checkups and visit your dentist before each playing season;
- bring your mouthguard to each dental visit.

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

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