



MOUTHGUARDS

Knowing how to prevent injuries to your mouth and face is especially important if you participate in organized sports or other recreational activities. Mouthguards, also called mouth protectors, help cushion a blow to the face, minimizing the risk of broken teeth and injuries to your lips, tongue, face, or jaw. They typically cover the upper teeth and are a great way to protect the soft tissues of your tongue, lips, and cheek lining.

When should you wear a mouthguard?

A mouthguard is an essential piece of athletic gear that should be part of your standard equipment from an early age. Mouthguards should be worn any time you engage in sports or physical activity where injury to the mouth could occur. Athletic teams and recreational sports leagues may require that you wear a mouthguard. While collision and contact sports such as boxing and football are higher-risk sports for the mouth, a dental injury can occur in non-contact activities such as gymnastics and skating.

Types of mouthguards

The best mouthguard is one that has been custom made for your mouth by your dentist. However, if you cannot afford a custom-made mouthguard, purchase a stock mouthguard or a boil-and-bite mouthguard from a store. Learn more about each option:

- **Custom-made:** These are made by your dentist for you personally. They are more expensive than the other versions because they are individually created for fit and comfort.
- **Boil and bite:** These can be bought at many sporting goods stores and drugstores and may offer a better fit than stock mouth protectors. They are first boiled in water and then the softened protector is inserted and conforms to the shape of your mouth. Always follow the manufacturers' instructions.
- **Stock:** These are inexpensive and come pre-formed, ready to wear. Unfortunately, they often do not fit very well. They can be bulky and can make breathing and talking difficult.

Protecting Your Braces

A properly fitted mouthguard may be especially important for people who wear braces or have fixed bridge work. A blow to the face could damage the brackets or other fixed orthodontic appliances. A mouthguard also provides a barrier between the braces and your cheek or lips, which will help you avoid injuries to your gums and cheeks.

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Talk to your dentist or orthodontist about selecting a mouthguard that will provide the right protection. Some mouthguards only cover the upper teeth. They may advise to use a mouthguard on the lower teeth if you have braces on those teeth.

Do not wear a retainer or other removable appliance during any contact sport.

Mouthguard Care and Replacement

Talk to your dentist about when to replace your mouthguard. Replace it immediately if it shows sign of wear, is damaged, or fits poorly. Teens and children may need to replace their mouthguards more often because their mouths are still growing and changing.

Between games, it is important to keep your mouthguard clean and dry. Here are some tips for making sure your mouthguard is always ready to go:

- Rinse before and after each use or brush with a toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Regularly clean the mouthguard in cool, soapy water. Then rinse it thoroughly.
- During your regular dental checkups, bring your mouthguard for an evaluation. Your dentist may also be able to give it a thorough cleaning.
- Store and transport the mouthguard in a sturdy container that has vents so it can dry and keep bacteria from growing.
- Never leave the mouthguard in the sun or in hot water.
- Check fit and for signs of wear and tear to see if it needs replacing.
- Some mouthguards have fallen victim to family pets, who see them as chew toys. Store your mouthguard and case where your pet cannot get to it.

For more information

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2020. *Mouthguards*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from: <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/m/mouthguards>
2. How Mouthguards Help to Protect Athletes. 2013. [Illustration of How Mouthguard Protects Athletes]. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from: <http://www.thedentalcenterofthevalley.com/library/7662/MouthguardsforAdults.html>

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