



Anyone who participates in sports, whether for pleasure, in youth or adult leagues, or even on a professional level – knows that losing isn't the worst thing that can happen to a player; sustaining a serious injury is, particularly when that injury is preventable.

That's why it's so important for adults and children who are active in sports to wear protective gear such as helmets, shin guards, knee and elbow pads, and mouthguards. Wearing a mouthguard can prevent serious injury and save a lot of pain. Each year this simple safety measure prevents more than 200,000 oral injuries among athletes.

Mouthguards Aren't Mandatory in Most Sports. Why Are They Important?

Facial and head injuries can be sustained in nearly every game, from "contact" sports such as football, soccer and basketball, to "non-contact" sports like baseball, gymnastics, bicycling or skateboarding. Damage to the teeth, lips, tongue and jaws are frequent occurrences in both children and adults. General dentists see more injuries to the mouth as a result of playing sports than from almost any other single cause. A survey conducted by the University of Texas found nearly 5 percent of male college athletes who played football, basketball, soccer, volleyball, baseball, ice hockey and lacrosse without wearing a mouthguard sustained some oral injury. That's more than 2,000 injuries in just a single year at the college level alone! It's at the junior high, high school, community and amateur levels that most injuries occur.

Although more research is needed, mouthguards may help prevent serious injuries such as concussions. The literature has shown that mouthguards definitely help prevent fractured jaws and teeth, severe cuts to the cheek and tongue (often requiring surgery for repair), and traumatic damage to the roots and bone that hold teeth in place. Mouthguards are designed to help cushion the mouth, teeth and jaw, preventing significant damage where sports injuries are most prevalent. While mouthguards are not required equipment in many sports, wearing one is an important precaution for athletes of any age and ability.

What Should I Know Before Choosing a Mouthguard?

For a mouthguard to be most effective, it is essential that it fit properly and stay in place during vigorous activity and the various positions the sport requires. Your CDA member dentist can determine what appliances (braces, retainers, bridgework, dentures) would be affected by wearing a mouthguard. Because growth spurts occur in the mouth just as they do elsewhere in the body, it's especially important for child's mouth to be evaluated by a CDA member dentist before selecting a mouthguard.

Different sports involve different levels of risk and potential injury. With the help of your CDA member dentist, you can select the right type of mouthguard for you or your child's sport of choice.

What are the Different Types of Mouthguards?

All mouthguards are not created equal. Depending upon the design and materials used, mouthpieces will vary in fit, protection, ease of maintenance and longevity. Listed below are several types of mouthguards. Consult your CDA member dentist before you make a decision.

Custom-Made. Formed by your dentist from a cast model of your teeth, these custom-made guards are designed to cover all the teeth and are shown in the literature to be the best type of protection. These mouthguards can cushion falls and blows to the chin. Custom-made mouthguards may be slightly more expensive than commercially produced mouthpieces, but they offer the best possible fit and protection and are the most comfortable.

Mouth-Formed. These guards are generally made of acrylic gel or thermoplastic materials shaped to fit the contours of your teeth. They are placed in boiling water then attempted to be formed and molded to the teeth. They are commercially produced and do not offer the same fit and protection as a custom fitted mouthguard made from a model of the mouth.

Ready-Made Stock. Commercially produced, off-the-shelf mouthguards are the least expensive, but also the least comfortable and the least effective protective mouthpieces. These rubber or polyvinyl pre-formed guards can be purchased at most sporting goods stores. They offer no attempt at fit whatsoever and are not recommended in the dental literature.

What Can I Do To Make My Mouthguard Last?

Like all sports equipment, proper care will make any mouthguard last longer. Keep your mouthpiece in top shape by rinsing it with soap and water or mouthwash after each use and allowing it to air-dry. With proper care, a mouthguard should last the length of a season. The condition of the mouthguard should be checked before each use, particularly if the athlete has a tendency to chew on it. Mouthguards may be checked by your CDA member dentist at your regularly scheduled examinations.

Wearing a Mouthguard Makes Good Sense.

If you or your children participate in sports, make sure that you are informed about the most common injuries that can occur during play and take appropriate steps to be protected. Always wear a properly fitted mouthguard when you play. Do not wear removable appliances (retainers, bridges, or complete or partial dentures) when playing sports.

Staying in shape – and intact – is an integral part of an overall strategy for all sports. Protecting against injuries will keep you in the game. Keep your competitive edge. Protect both your general and oral health for your best performance on and off the field.