



## Mouthguards for Sports—To Wear or Not to Wear?

Organized sports require lots of gear. One of the most important items is a mouthguard. It is small and sometimes overlooked, but has the potential to prevent serious injury to the mouth and head. You would not be allowed to play football, basketball, hockey and other sports without wearing a mouthguard. However, mouth injuries can also occur during some activities that are not considered “contact” sports. Cross country track exposes the teeth and jaws to repetitive jarring. Any sport or activity where a person clenches the teeth together repeatedly, or is exposed to jarring of the jaw where the teeth hit each other in an uncontrolled manner, is an opportunity for dental injury.

Most dental injuries happen during a non-official event, such as a pick-up game of football or basketball, where players do not use safety gear. It only takes a moment for an elbow in the mouth, a hockey puck to the mouth, or even falling off a bicycle, for a serious dental injury to occur. Sports-related dental injuries are costly, and the consequences can last a lifetime.

Organized sports have long required mouthguards to prevent players from having teeth knocked out. Research now exists

that shows mouthguards can prevent or reduce the severity of concussions received during contact sports ([ada.org](http://ada.org), 2006). The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends for “adults and children to wear a sports mouthguard during any recreational activity that may pose a risk of injury to the mouth.” The increased risk of injury is up to two times greater without the use of mouthguards.

There are three types of sports mouthguards: a stock mouthguard, given as part of the gear for a specific sport; over the counter, boil and bite mouthguards, which come in a variety of brands and colors; and custom mouthguards, which are made by your dentist. Custom mouthguards offer the best fit and the best protection from injury, but are more expensive and take time to make. They also need to be replaced as adolescents lose baby teeth and permanent teeth erupt.

Make sure your children protect their mouths by using their mouthguards whenever playing sports. Make sure you protect your teeth, too. Dental injuries can happen at any age.

- Carolyn Alonardo, RDH and Jean McPheters, RDH