

Staying in the game with mouthguards



Athletic mouthguards are recommended by many dental organizations and are required safety equipment for participation in some sports.^{1,2} Sports participants of all ages can benefit from mouthguards.¹

You might think that mouthguards are just for sports like football and hockey, but they also are recommended for other sports. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry says that most oral injuries among 13- through 17-year-olds occur while playing basketball; baseball accounts for most of the oral injuries in 7- through 12-year-olds.² Experts also note that athletes who take part in noncontact sports, like gymnastics and in-line skating, also can benefit from mouthguard use.¹

Typically, sports-related mouth injuries may cause a change in tooth color, infection, and even tooth loss. Injuries also can occur to the cheeks, lips, and tongue.

TYPES OF MOUTHGUARDS

A mouthguard should completely cover all of the teeth, including the back ones. It should separate the cheeks, tongue, and lips from the teeth. It also should stay in place during use.¹

There are 3 types of mouthguards¹:

- Stock mouthguards can be bought in many drug stores and athletic supply stores. They are inexpensive but may require that the athlete's mouth be closed to hold the mouthguard in place. This can interfere with speaking and breathing.
- Boil-and-bite mouthguards are also available in stores. To achieve a better fit than stock mouthguards, the boil-and-bite mouthguard can be fitted by softening it in boiling water, placing it over the upper teeth, and biting down on it until it cools (always follow directions on the package). You should look over the mouthguard after you have fitted it to ensure that it has not become too thin, especially where the teeth come together.
- Custom-made mouthguards are made especially for the athlete by dentists. Because they are customized to each athlete, they are more expensive than the other types, but they also offer a better fit.

Regardless of the mouthguard you choose, it should be worn during any athletic event, including playtime, practices, and games.

CARING FOR YOUR MOUTHGUARD

Here are some tips for caring for your mouthguard:

- After each use, clean your mouthguard. You can brush it using a toothbrush and toothpaste or dental cleaners that

bubble when mixed with water, like those used for cleaning dentures. In either case, rinse it with cool to lukewarm water when you are finished.³

- Store your mouthguard in a container that has openings to allow air to circulate through the container. Keep this container away from young children and dogs who might damage the mouthguard.
- Bring your mouthguard to your dental visits so that your dentist can check to make sure the fit offers you protection.^{3,4}
- For mouthguards bought in stores, look for a product that earned the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance. This is a sign that the mouthguard is safe and effective when used as directed.

CONCLUSION

Protect the mouth during athletic events with a mouthguard, whether for play or organized sports. Work with your dentist to be sure your mouthguard offers the best protection. ■

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adaj.2022.03.004>

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Disclosure. Ms. Mark did not report any disclosures.

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You can find more information for patients at ADAcatalog.org or at MouthHealthy.org.

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