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MOUTH GUARDS

Don't be the victim of a preventable injury: wear a mouth guard. While mouth guards are not mandatory equipment in all sports, their worth is indisputable. Dentists see many oral and facial injuries that might have been prevented by the use of a mouth guard.

Facial injuries in nearly every sport can result in damage to teeth, lips, cheeks, and tongue. Mouth guards cushion blows to the face. A mouth guard should be part of every athlete's gear, no matter the sport. It's better to play it safe than face a devastating painful oral injury.

Even adults are not free from the dangers of mouth injuries. Dentists treat many trauma injuries in weekend athletes. Whatever your age or sport, mouth guards are an important part of the sports safety and your exercise routine. Do what you can to protect your smile and preserve your health.

Dos and Don'ts

- * Do wear a mouth guard at all times when playing sports
- * Do inform yourself about the most common oral injuries
- * Do wear a mouth guard custom-fitted by your dentist, especially if you wear fixed dental appliances such as braces, implants, or crown and bridges.
- * Don't wear removable appliances when playing sports or wearing your mouth guard (retainers, removable bridges, complete or partial dentures)
- * Keep your mouth guard in top shape by rinsing it with water or mouthwash after each use and allowing it to air-dry. With proper care, it should last the length of a season or longer.

WHAT ARE YOUR CHOICES

There are 3 types of mouth guards: Custom-made, mouth-formed, and ready made.

Custom-Made Mouth Guards: These are professionally designed by your dentist from a cast model of your teeth. Because they are designed to cover all back teeth and cushion the entire jaw, they can prevent concussions caused by blows to the chin. Custom guards may be more expensive than commercially produced mouthpieces, but they offer the best possible fit and protection. They are more secure in the mouth and reduce interference with speech or breathing. Calling plays or formations, for instance, will not be impeded as much by the custom guards.

Mouth-formed guards -- also called "boil and bite" is generally done by shaping a soft pre-formed guard to the contours of the teeth and allowing it to harden. However, these devices are difficult to design for athletes who wear braces and they can become brittle after prolonged use.

Ready-Made guards: Commercial mouth guards can be purchased at most sporting goods stores and are made of rubber or polyvinyl. They are the least expensive, least comfortable and the least effective.