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Healthy Living

Athletic Mouthguards

It's Your Health

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The Issue

A single blow to the mouth or jaw can cause serious dental damage that is very painful and expensive to treat. You can minimize the risk of this type of injury by using a mouthguard when you take part in sports and other recreational activities.

Background

Mouthguards are resilient appliances that fit over your teeth. When worn during sports activities, mouthguards help protect against injuries to the teeth and other areas in and around your mouth.

The risk of this kind of injury is commonly associated with contact sports, such as football, rugby, hockey, and boxing. However, dental and other mouth injuries may also occur as a result of contact with people or objects during many other athletic activities, including basketball, soccer, squash, gymnastics, skateboarding, and taekwondo.

While the number of mouth injuries caused by sports activities is relatively low, the cost of these injuries is relatively high, especially if there is damage to the teeth. Depending on the type and extent of dental injury, a single blow to the mouth may result in months or even years of treatment, with costs ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars.

How Mouthguards Protect You

When you are hit in the mouth or jaw, a mouthguard acts as a cushion that redistributes the force of the blow, so the impact is absorbed more evenly. A mouthguard also provides a barrier between your teeth and the soft tissue in and around your mouth. Many studies have shown that mouthguards help prevent chipped or broken teeth and protect against cuts to lips, gums, and other soft tissue in the mouth area.

Some studies claim that mouthguards may also help prevent other types of injuries, such as concussion, cerebral haemorrhage (bleeding from a ruptured blood vessel in the brain), and neck injuries. At present, the scientific evidence supporting these claims is not conclusive. However, the Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine (CASM) issued a Position Statement in 2004 suggesting that mouthguards should be worn during participation in soccer "for the definite dental protection they provide and the possible role in concussion prevention." See the [Need More Info?](#) section below for more information on the CASM Statement.

Types of Mouthguards

There are three main types of athletic mouthguards:

Stock mouthguards - These are ready-made. You simply place the appliance in your mouth and use it "as is." You can buy these in stores that sell sporting goods. They are also sold over the Internet.

Boil-and-bite mouthguards - These are made from materials that are resilient under normal conditions, but become pliable when heated. You place this type of mouthguard into very hot water until it softens, and then bite into it so it will take the shape of your mouth and fit more closely over your teeth. Like stock mouthguards, these are sold in sporting goods stores and over the Internet.

Custom-made mouthguards: These are prescribed and fitted by a dental professional. The process involves making a model of your teeth and then moulding the mouthguard material around the dental model to ensure a close and comfortable fit.

Choosing a Mouthguard

Mouthguards vary in terms of cost, comfort, and effectiveness. The ideal mouthguard is durable, resilient, and comfortable. It should fit properly, be easy to clean, and should not affect your ability to breathe or speak.

Here are some facts to consider when choosing a mouthguard:

- Stock mouthguards are typically the least expensive. They offer some protection, but they do not grip the teeth, and it can be difficult to keep them in place unless you bite down on them constantly.
- Boil-and-bite models fit more closely around the teeth and this makes it easier to keep them in place. However, when you bite into the hot mouthguard to give it the right shape, you reduce the thickness of the device. This, in turn, may reduce the level of protection.
- Custom-made mouthguards are the most expensive, but they have a better fit, which means better protection and more comfort.

If you or your children wear braces or other fixed orthodontic appliances, it is especially important to have a mouthguard that fits properly. Otherwise, a blow to the mouth can damage the brackets and wires of the braces, and can also cause added damage (cuts and tears) to the soft tissue inside your mouth. Mouthguards are usually worn only on the upper teeth, but people with braces on their lower teeth should consider using mouthguards on both sets of teeth.

Minimizing Your Risk

Mouthguards are a smart investment because they provide valuable insurance against injuries that could cost much more in the long run in - not only in financial terms, but also in terms of time and suffering. Protect yourself by using an athletic mouthguard when you take part in activities that pose a risk of injury to your mouth. Choose the model that best suits your needs and your budget. For advice about choosing the right mouthguard for you or your children, consult your dental professional or an official from a sports league or association.

Take proper care of your mouthguard:

- Keep it clean. You can use mild soap and a soft toothbrush. Rinse your mouthguard with cold water or a mouthwash before and after each use.
- Store it in a ventilated, rigid container. Keep it away from heat, including direct sunlight.

Check your mouthguard regularly for wear and tear. Mouthguards become less effective over time, and should be replaced when they get torn, or become too loose or too thin.

Health Canada's Role

Health Canada helps Canadians maintain and improve their health. In part, this involves working with other levels of government, health care professionals, patient and consumer interest groups, research communities, and manufacturers to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits associated with health products.

Health Canada also monitors the safety, effectiveness, and quality of health products after they reach the marketplace, and provides Canadians with the information they need to make healthy choices and informed decisions about their health and safety.

The Office of the Chief Dental Officer (OCDO) is the focal point within Health Canada on issues related to oral health. The mandate of the office is to increase the awareness of good oral habits and to improve the oral health of Canadians. As there is a link between oral health and general health, an improvement in oral health may lead to an improvement in overall general health.

Need More Info?

For more information, contact:

[Office of the Chief Dental Officer](#)

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Health Canada's Healthy Living [Oral Health](#) site.

To read the [Canadian Academy of Sport and Exercise Medicine](#) (CASM) recommendation about the use of mouthguards while playing soccer, go to: www.casm-acms.org click on "Position Statements", and select "Head Injuries and Concussions in Soccer."

Also, visit the [Canadian Dental Hygienists Association](#) (CDHA) Web site to read [Mouthguard Use and Care](#).

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the [It's Your Health](#) Web site. You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*.

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