

Do you need a mouthguard?

It's easy to take some things for granted until they're suddenly gone. Imagine what it would be like if you lost one or two of your front teeth. Smiling, talking or eating—they'd all be pretty unpleasant.

A properly fitted mouthguard, or mouth protector, is an important piece of athletic gear that can help protect your smile. You may have seen mouthguards used in contact sports, particularly in football, boxing, ice hockey, lacrosse and field hockey. Mouthguards help cushion blows that might otherwise cause broken teeth and injuries to the lips, tongue, face or jaw. It's believed that they also may reduce the severity and incidence of concussions.

You don't have to be on the football field or in a hockey rink to benefit from a properly fitted mouthguard. New findings in sports dentistry show that even in noncontact sports, such as gymnastics, mouthguards will help protect participants. Many experts recommend that everyone—from children to adults—wear a mouthguard during any recreational activity that might pose a risk of injury to the mouth.

CHOOSING A MOUTHGUARD

There are three types of mouthguards:

- the ready-made, or stock, mouthguard;
- the mouth-formed "boil-and-bite" mouthguard;



The ready-made mouthguard.

- the custom-made mouthguard made by your dentist.

All three mouthguards provide protection, but they vary in comfort and cost.

The most effective mouthguard

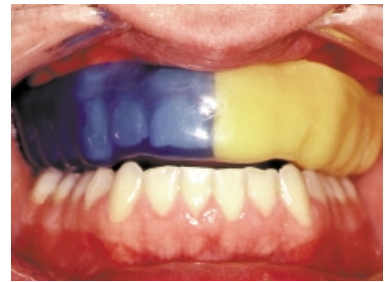
should be resilient, tear-resistant and comfortable. It should fit properly, be durable and

easy to clean, and not restrict your speech or breathing.

Generally, a mouthguard covers only the upper teeth, but in some cases the dentist will make a mouthguard for the lower teeth as well. Your dentist can suggest the right mouthguard for you.



The mouth-formed mouthguard.



The custom-made mouthguard.

Photos courtesy of The Academy of Sports Dentistry

CARING FOR YOUR MOUTHGUARD

- Before and after each use, rinse it with cold water or with a mouthrinse.

You can clean it with toothpaste and a toothbrush.

- Occasionally clean the mouthguard in cool, soapy water and rinse it thoroughly.
- Place the mouthguard in a firm, perforated container to store or transport it. This permits air circulation and helps to prevent damage.
- To minimize distortion, avoid high temperatures, such as hot water, hot surfaces or direct sunlight.

Like any other sports gear, a mouthguard will wear out, making it less effective. If your mouthguard has holes or tears or becomes loose, it can irritate the teeth and oral tissues. Occasionally check the mouthguard's condition and replace it as necessary.

Schedule regular dental check-ups and bring your mouthguard to each dental visit. ■

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