

Mouthguard Awareness

Protecting more than just your teeth **By Devin Jones**

Talk about mouthguards often comes up in the world of contact sports. But what does a mouthguard do? People often think it's just a bothersome hunk of plastic that protects your teeth from getting knocked out. Well, you're right, but there is more to it than that. Professionals believe there are several good reasons all athletes – professional and amateur – should wear a mouthguard.

So your teeth don't get knocked out.

So you don't bite your tongue or cheek, which would hurt.

So you don't suffer a concussion if you get hit in the jaw.

If you take a hit to the jaw, chances are it's lights out. Getting knocked out could very well mean a concussion. "Mouthguards are vital in the world of sports. Mouthguards help prevent injury to the teeth and oral cavity but also are a factor in minimizing complications from concussions," says Cathie Mazal-Kuula, President of the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario.

Who should wear a mouthguard? The College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario

thinks mouthguards are important in minimizing injuries that may occur in sports such as ice hockey, field hockey, football, boxing, baseball, basketball, wrestling, lacrosse or rugby.

A mouthguard can really help prevent jaw fractures, which, if you get one, is not going to make you very happy. The mouthguard acts as a cushion between the upper and lower teeth or gums, helping prevent dislocation and other very painful injuries.

It's very important to clean your mouthguard with soap and warm water. Keep it in a case with lots of holes to dry otherwise it will develop lots of bacteria. And don't cut it or chew on it. That means you can't just leave it attached to your hockey mask all season and forget about it.

Types of mouthguards.

Stock or ready made. These mouthguards are made of rubber and sometimes don't fit very well making it hard to talk and breathe.

Boil and bite. You heat these mouthguards in warm water, and then you bite down into it and make an impression.

Custom made. These mouthguards are a bit more expensive because they are made exactly for your teeth and mouth.

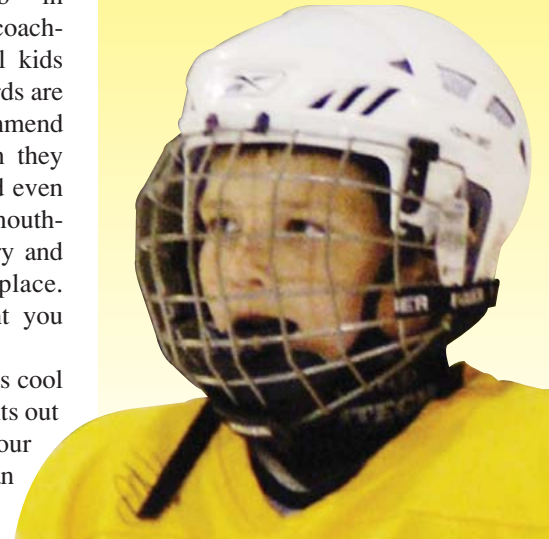
A lot of kids wear braces these days. A properly fitted mouthguard is important because a blow to the face could very well damage the brackets on your teeth. If you have a retainer do not wear it during any contact sports.

Scott Symons is my coach from Faustina Sports Hockey Club in Etobicoke, Ontario. His experience coaching hockey is that even though all kids have to wear face guards, mouthguards are very useful. Scott says, "I recommend kids start using mouthguards when they start playing competitive sports, and even when they go leisure skating. A mouthguard can save a person from injury and losing teeth that are hard to replace. Mouthguards can also help prevent you from swallowing your tongue."

Although some kids think that it's cool not to wear a mouthguard, Scott points out that as you grow older you realize your teeth are far more important than looking cool in your uniform.

What to do if you injure your mouth

- **Do** make sure you get immediate medical treatment
- **Do** go to your oral care professional as soon as possible if your teeth or jaw are hurt.
- **Don't** store dislodged tooth or teeth in tissue.
- **Do** store the tooth or teeth in cold milk on the way to your oral care professional.



*Hey Sport....
Wear a
Mouthguard!
Custom-fitted mouthguards
protect your smile!*



Oral Health Matters...

Visit your dental hygienist regularly. This is one of the most important steps you can take to maintain or improve your oral health. For more information about oral health contact your dental hygienist. Dental hygienists are registered, educated professionals responsible for oral health. As prevention professionals, they make an important contribution to overall health.

College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario

Visit our web-site at www.cdho.org

(416) 961-6234

(1-800) 268-2346

