

## Mouthguards

A mouthguard, custom-fitted by your dentist, can reduce the risk of dental injuries. Sport, leisure and recreation activities are the most common cause of dental injuries. About 2,000 dental injuries were treated in Victorian hospital emergency departments between 2002 and 2004. People under 25 are most at risk (71%).

Dental injuries can be painful, disfiguring and expensive to treat. Dental injuries may result in time off work or school to recover, and lengthy (and expensive) dental treatment. A mouthguard, custom-fitted by your dentist and worn every time you play or train, will protect against dental injuries. See your dentist for further information.

### Common dental injuries

Common dental injuries incurred during sport or leisure activities include:

- Cut lips
- Cut gums
- Cut cheeks
- Cuts to the tongue or face
- Chipped teeth
- Broken teeth
- Knocked out teeth
- Broken jaw.

### Dental injury and sport

Sport, leisure and recreation activities are the most common cause of dental injuries. Selected statistics include:

- Accidents when cycling, skateboarding and scooter riding account for about 44 per cent of dental injuries.
- Team sports such as football, boxing, basketball, netball, cricket, hockey and soccer account for up to 14 per cent of dental injuries.
- Any sport where contact with equipment, collision with other players or falling is possible (even accidentally) carries a risk of dental injury.

### Risk factors

Some people are at higher risk of dental injury. Risk factors include:

- Protrusive ('buck') front teeth
- Inadequate lip coverage over the front teeth
- Current orthodontic treatment, such as wearing braces
- Participation in sports or leisure activities that carry a high risk of collision or falls
- Failure to wear a mouthguard when participating in certain sports or leisure activities.

### Mouthguard features

Wearing an appropriately designed and made mouthguard while participating in sport will protect against dental injuries. Players of all ages involved in sports and activities where they are at risk of an injury to the face should protect their teeth with a properly fitted mouthguard. A protective mouthguard should:

- Be comfortable yet tight-fitting
- Allow normal breathing and swallowing
- Allow normal speech
- Not cause gagging
- Be odourless and tasteless
- Be thick enough (4mm) to provide protection against impact.

## Types of mouthguards

The three basic types of mouthguard include:

- **Custom-fitted** – considered to provide the best protection for the teeth, lips and jaw. Custom-fitted mouthguards are made by a dentist or a dental technician to fit the individual's mouth. They provide the best protection due to their close fit, comfort and cushioning (shock absorption) effect. They are the most expensive option. However, the cost of an injury to the teeth or jaw will be a lot more expensive. Dentists recommend custom-fitted mouthguards.
- **Boil-and-bite** – once the lining is softened in boiling water, the person bites on the mouthguard to help it take the shape of their mouth. These mouthguards may not conform to the person's bite and can be uncomfortable to wear. A 'boil-and-bite' mouthguard should be replaced each season.
- **Stock** – a ready-to-wear mouthguard that comes pre-formed. While these are the least expensive mouthguard, they also offer the least amount of protection. They tend to be uncomfortable and fit poorly.

## How to care for your mouthguard

Suggestions include:

- Rinse the mouthguard in soap and warm (not hot) water after each use. Allow it to air-dry.
- Disinfect the mouthguard from time to time with a mouthwash.
- Keep the mouthguard in a well-ventilated plastic storage box when not in use. The box should have several holes in it.
- Do not leave the mouthguard in direct sunlight, in a closed car or in the car's glove box. Heat can damage it.
- Ensure your mouthguard is in good condition before each use.
- Ask your dentist to inspect your mouthguard at every dental check-up.
- Replace the mouthguard if it is damaged.
- Replace a child's mouthguard every 12 to 18 months, even if it appears to be in good condition. Growth and new teeth can alter the fit.
- Replace an adult's mouthguard after dental treatment or tooth loss. Otherwise it should last for several years.

## General safety tips

Be guided by your dentist and coach, but general suggestions include:

- Wear the mouthguard at all times, including games and training sessions.
- Players undergoing dental treatment can have a custom-fitted mouthguard made by their dentist to fit comfortably and accurately over their braces.
- See your dentist if the mouthguard starts to feel uncomfortable or doesn't fit well.

## Where to get help

- Your dentist
- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)

- Dental Health Services Victoria Tel. (03) 9341 1000 or (03) 9341 1111 (from rural Victoria)
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

## Things to remember

- Sport, leisure and recreation activities are the most common cause of dental injuries.
- A mouthguard, custom-fitted by your dentist, is considered to provide the best protection for the teeth, lips and jaw.
- The cost of an injury to the teeth or jaw far exceeds the cost of a custom-fitted mouthguard.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

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