



## Northeast Delta Dental

# Sports mouth guards to protect against dental injuries

### What are sports mouth guards?

Sports mouth guards, also called mouth protectors or athletic mouth guards, are devices that are used to protect the teeth, gums, and soft tissues of the mouth from sports-related injuries. The American Dental Association recommends people of all ages use a mouth guard if they are participating in contact sports or other activities that could cause mouth or dental injury.

Occlusal guards, or nightguards, which are used to prevent clenching and bruxism, as well as sleep apnea devices, are sometimes associated with the mouth guard category. However, these are separate oral devices that we cover in a separate article.

### Who needs a sports mouth guard?

Sports mouth guards are intended people of all ages who participate in an activity that poses a risk of damaging the mouth, whether competitively or recreationally.

A sports mouth guard is recommended if you play contact sports. This includes, but is not limited to, football, soccer, boxing, basketball, field hockey, ice hockey, volleyball, and wrestling. Sports mouthguards can also be used for other non-contact sports and recreational activities that may cause damage to the mouth, such as gymnastics, biking, skateboarding, and ice- and roller-skating.<sup>1</sup>

### Types of sports mouth guards

- 1. Stock (ready-made)** – Ready-made mouth guards are the least expensive and most commonly available type. These are typically available at department and sporting goods stores and do not require a visit to the dentist. Stock mouth guards come in a range of sizes and are not personalized for each individual mouth.
- 2. Mouth formed (boil and bite)** – These self-adapting mouth guards soften when placed in hot water and are then adapted to the wearer's individual mouth through bite pressure and manipulation of fingers and tongue. Dentists may assist with final molding, but otherwise, you can these types of mouth guards at many retail establishments and sporting goods stores.
- 3. Custom mouth guards** – These mouth guards are created in a laboratory or dental office from a patient's bite impressions. A custom mouth guard provides the best fit, comfort, and efficiency, but is also the most expensive option and require dental visits. Comfort is an important aspect to keep in mind during the selection process because a mouth guard only works if it is worn.<sup>2</sup>

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## More frequently asked questions...

### If I have braces, can I wear a sports mouth guard?

Yes! It is particularly important to wear a mouth guard if you play sports and wear braces. Mouth guards will not only protect your teeth, but also prevent the braces from accidentally tearing your lips, cheeks, and tongue.

Stock and mouth-formed mouth guards designed for wear with braces are available, but most dentists will recommend a custom-made guard for the most comfortable fit. These mouth guards will need adjustments as the braces begin to change your teeth alignment. Your orthodontist or dentist can make the mouth guard and monitor its fit over time.<sup>3</sup>

It's important to the right fit for your mouth and braces to protect the substantial investment you are making in your long-term oral health.

### Do mouthguards prevent injuries?

Yes! Numerous studies show that mouth guards can help prevent serious dental injuries, like broken and knocked out teeth and jaw fractures, as well as injuries to your lips, tongue, cheeks and jaws.<sup>4</sup> A mouth guard helps avoid situations where the lower jaw gets jammed into the upper jaw by providing a cushioning effect between teeth and redistributing the forces of any sudden impact. A mouth guard also helps prevent the teeth from cutting into the soft tissues of the oral cavity.

### How should I care for a mouth guard?

It's important to take care of your sports mouthguard by regularly cleaning it with soap and warm water and soaking it in alcohol-free mouthwash. You can also prevent bacteria from growing by always storing it in a ventilated case when not in use so that it stays dry.

You should also avoid leaving your mouth guard in direct sunlight in a hot car and be mindful of not bending the mouth guard the wrong way.

Like a toothbrush, your mouth guard can wear out, so it is important to regularly check for wear and tear. We recommend bringing your mouth guard to your dental appointments so your dentist can check it for fit and wear in order to determine if it needs replacement.

### Is a mouth guard only for upper teeth?

Typically, a mouth guard only covers the upper teeth. However, if you have braces, your dentist or orthodontist may suggest a mouth guard for the lower teeth as well. If you have a protruding jaw, or an underbite, or you wear dental appliances like retainers, implant-supported dentures, or bridgework, then your dentist may recommend a mouth guard for lower teeth.

### Final thoughts

Sports mouth guards are an important piece of athletic equipment. For anyone involved in competitive or recreational activities where the risk of getting hit in the face or mouth by a ball, stick, puck, flying body part, or face plant into the ground exists, wearing a mouth guard is certainly recommended.

You may wonder what kind of sports mouth guard is right for you. Ultimately, the most effective sports mouth guard is one you will wear. It should be comfortable, resistant to tearing, and durable, as well as fit properly, be easy to clean, and not restrict speech or breathing. For more information, we recommend you speak to your dentist who can answer any questions you may have.

Broken or knocked-out teeth do not grow back. Protect your perfect smile and wear a mouth guard.

<https://www.deltadental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile/overall-health/oral-habits---safety/sports-mouth-guards-to-protect-against-dental-injuries.html>

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Retrieved from <https://www.ada.org/en/member-center/oral-health-topics/mouthguards>

<sup>2</sup>Retrieved from <https://www.ada.org/en/member-center/oral-health-topics/mouthguards>

<sup>3</sup>Mouthguards. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/m/mouthguards>

<sup>4</sup>The Role of the Mouthguard in the Prevention of Sports-Related Dental Injuries: A Review: PR Newsome 1, DC Tran, MS Cooke