

## MOUTHGUARDS AND YOU

### **Did you Know:**

An athlete is sixty times more likely to sustain damage to teeth when not wearing a protective mouthguard. More than five million teeth are knocked out each year in North America, many during sporting events. In fact, **dental injuries are the most common type of injury to the face sustained during participation in sports** — especially practices. The loss of a single tooth can be costly and cause teeth and jaw problems that will last over a person's lifetime.

A properly fitted mouthguard **reduces the chances of sustaining a face, neck, or head injury like a concussion from something as simple as a fall.**

The cost of a fractured tooth or concussion is many times greater than the cost of a custom dentist made mouthguard.

Non-customized off-the-shelf sports mouthguards could dislodge, obstructing the airway. They also can cause difficulty breathing and speaking during use.

**The majority of dental injuries are preventable through the use of mouthguards. Studies on the merits of mouth guards in hockey continue to be researched and published but the majority of these studies are coming to the same conclusion; wearing a mouth guard helps prevent damaged teeth, concussions and jaw fractures. Mouth guards also prevent 'soft tissue' injuries to the lips, cheeks and gums, especially for kids wearing braces.**

**Be a good sport and wear a custom made sports guard. They are simple to have made and come in a variety of colors and styles.**

**Patients with braces are still able to wear mouth guards** — in fact a mouth guard will help prevent your wires/bands from breaking during a game and will also prevent your lips and gums from imbedding in the braces after a blow. As well, mouth guards significantly reduce the incidence of concussion.

### **There are several kinds of mouthguards to choose from:**

#### **1 Custom mouth guards**

Custom guards are usually made by vacuum or pressure forming a polyvinyl mold guard over a stone model of the athlete's teeth. Though somewhat more expensive than other guards, these **custom made guards provide significantly better protection, comfort and fit.** Available from your dentist, these superior guards ensure that the athlete's speech and breathing are not impaired. For elite athletes, a heat laminated mouthguard provides even greater protection. **An on-site lab can fabricate mouthguards in a variety of colors and styles.** When used together with a helmet and facemask, a custom-made mouth guard will greatly reduce injuries to the head and neck. A custom-made mouth guard will protect your jaw joint or prevent concussions by acting as a cushion for your lower jaw. **A custom fabricated mouthguard will reduce the incidence of jaw fracture, protect the soft tissue of your mouth, like the lips, tongue, cheek, and gums, and lessen the chances of breaking your front teeth by about 90%.**

## **2. Stock ready to wear guards**

These kinds of mouth guards are inexpensive but often impair speech or breathing and may be difficult to wear, as the athlete must bite down on the guard to hold it in place. They are based on the concept of "one size fits all."

## **3. Boil and bite guards**

These kinds of guards, though better formed than stock guards, are often bulky and don't fit particularly well, causing problems with speech and breathing. Available at the local sporting goods or hardware stores, these are sold in a small, medium, or large format - not customized to an individual bite. The ready-made mouth guards might not cost much but they are criticized for not providing enough protection because they fit every mouth differently. Custom-made mouth guards are criticized for their price tag which can easily hit the \$100 level and beyond. The 'boil and bite' mouth guards are somewhere in between when it comes to cost, fit and protection which is why you'll find 'boil and bite' guards in the mouths of most Canadian kids.

# **Mouth guard maintenance**

When was the last time you washed or even just rinsed your son's or daughter's mouth guard?

It's an oversight though, reminder why every minor hockey player in Canada should have a mouthful of mouth guard every time he or she hits the ice.

### **Keep it clean**

No matter how much you paid for your child's mouth guard, it should be cleaned as often as possible. Dental professionals, hygienists and everyone else involved in the teeth business agree that mouth guards are perfect breeding grounds for bacteria, yeasts and mold. This microscopic matter thrives in the tiny little bumps, grooves and pores that exist in all mouth guards. In fact, it thrives so much, the mouth guard eventually becomes a pretty nasty piece of equipment by the time it heads back into our kid's mouths.

With that in mind, here's a new 1 minute, 3-step plan of attack.

### **Step One**

After you have laid out all the equipment to dry in the basement, head to the kitchen sink with a toothbrush and the mouth guard. Brush the mouth guard using cool water for about 20 seconds.

### **Step Two**

Pour some mouthwash on the mouth guard and brush it for another 20 seconds. Then rinse it off with more cool water.

**Step Three**

Store the mouth guard in a plastic container with air holes so it has a chance to dry. (And remember to clean out the plastic container every now and then as well.)

Three easy steps taking about a minute of your time to ensure your kids aren't putting a bacteria-bomb back in their mouth. And just like that, you've given your little hockey/Ringette player a fresh reason to 'smile' at the rink again this weekend.