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MOUTH PROTECTORS: ESSENTIAL SPORTS GEAR FOR CHILDREN

Accidents can happen during any physical activity. Research shows that one out of three boys and one out of four girls will experience a dental injury by the time they finish high school. Dental injuries can be avoided by using a mouth protector, also known as a mouth guard. A mouth protector can help cushion a blow to the face that otherwise might result in an injury to the mouth. A misdirected elbow in a one-on-one basketball game or a spill off a skateboard can leave a child with chipped or broken teeth, nerve damage to a tooth, or even tooth loss.

What is a mouth protector?

As the name implies, mouth protectors help prevent injury to the mouth area, especially the teeth, lips, cheeks, and tongue. It is a rubber-like cover which fits exactly over your teeth and gums, cushioning them and protecting them from damage. According to the American Dental Association, mouth protectors are designed to absorb the shock of impact and deflect the force that can also cause jaw fractures.

When should a child wear a mouth protector?

A child should wear a mouth protector whenever he or she plays a sport that involves physical contact or moving objects. This would include: baseball, basketball, bicycling, football, gymnastics, hockey, in-line skating, karate, racquet sports, rollerblading, skateboarding, soccer, softball, volleyball and wrestling.

How do I choose a mouth protector for my child?

Any mouth protector is better than no mouth protector. So, choose a mouth protector that your child can wear comfortably. If a mouth guard feels bulky or interferes with speech, then the child will be less likely to wear it.

- Stock mouth protectors: Available in sporting goods stores. You take it out of the package and the child puts it in his or her mouth before the sports activity. These are inexpensive, but may interfere with speech and breathing.
- Boil and Bite mouth protectors: Also available in sporting goods stores. Parent or dentist puts the mouth protector in water to soften it up before molding it to the child's mouth. Also inexpensive, but should offer a better fit and interfere less with breathing and speech than a stock mouth protector.
- Custom-fitted mouth protectors: Individually designed and constructed in the dental office or professional laboratory. Somewhat more expensive than store-bought mouth protectors, but it will fit better, is more comfortable, and doesn't interfere with speech or breathing.

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