

Protect your teeth before the damage is done



What is the ideal mouthguard?

A mouthguard must fit you properly so it can give you the best possible protection. Here are some things to consider when assessing the fit of a mouthguard.

- It should not make you gag.
- It should stay in position without you needing to bite or clench your teeth together.
- It should cover your teeth and it should fit over part of the gums to:
 - ▶ protect them from lacerations (cuts); and,
 - ▶ to protect the roots of your teeth.
- It should not interfere with your speech or breathing.
- It should be comfortable.

Mouthguards save on teeth, tears and trouble.
Be wise, be guarded!



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MOUTHGUARDS

Play sport?



Wear a mouthguard!

Prevent:

- Tooth fracture
- Financial expense
- Pain

- Lip and gum damage
- Root damage
- Jaw fracture
- Missing teeth

- Black, dead teeth
- Tongue damage
- Long-term dental procedures

One in 10 players of contact sports will experience serious dental trauma during their playing careers. Lifelong treatment for serious dental trauma can cost between €5,000 and €20,000 per tooth.

You can reduce the risk of tooth and mouth damage if you wear a well-designed and fitted mouthguard when taking part in these sports.

What is a mouthguard?

A mouthguard is a device worn over the teeth and it protects them when you receive blows to the face and head.

What does a mouthguard protect against?

Accidents can happen during any physical activity. Using a mouthguard can help you to avoid:

- chipped or broken teeth;
- nerve damage to a tooth; and,
- tooth loss.

Mouthguards also limit the extent of injuries to:

- lips;
- tongue; and,
- the soft tissues of the mouth.

What about non-contact sports?

You should also wear a mouthguard if you take part in:

- non-contact sports like gymnastics; or,
- any recreational activity that might pose a risk of injury to the mouth.

These recreational activities include skateboarding or mountain biking.

The experience of a dental injury can be very traumatic for the individual involved and for teammates and families. Wearing a mouthguard while playing any contact sports reduces the risks and the possible trauma.



What types of mouthguard are there?

The two types of mouthguard most commonly available are:

- custom-made mouthguards (recommended); and,
- 'boil and bite' type.

Custom-made mouthguards

These are individually designed and made by a dentist or by a professional dental laboratory based on a dentist's instructions. The dentist takes a mould of the teeth and then makes the mouthguard using a model of the teeth. It normally has a hard outer layer and a soft inner layer that fits around the teeth and gums. This type of mouthguard provides the most comfort and best fit, and it has little effect on speech or breathing.

In addition, dentists can take into account important issues like:

- proper design;
- thickness;
- fit; and,
- if the guard is appropriate for a particular activity.

Dentists can also consider previous dental injuries that mean you may need extra protection in specific areas. This can be done when the mouthguard is being constructed. This is only possible with custom-made mouthguards. Custom mouthguards are so precisely made that they can provide the best possible safety and comfort.

'Boil and bite' mouthguards

You can buy these in most sports equipment shops. They are packaged as smooth, pre-formed, u-shaped plastic trays. You can alter them by boiling them in water, then biting into the warm plastic and shaping them around the teeth using finger and tongue

pressure. In this way, the soft plastic is meant to mould to the shape of the teeth and gums. After cooling, the mouthguard can be adjusted with a scissors or blade.

However, without professional supervision, it is hard to assess if the mouthguard has been shaped enough to your mouth to be effective. It may lack proper thickness, which means it gives less protection than you need. It may also make it difficult to keep in your mouth. This type of mouthguard often loses its shape over time.

Mouthguards need to be kept up to date

You should remember that when there are changes in the mouth or to the teeth, for example when children are growing, you may need to change the mouthguard to accommodate these changes. You should discuss this with the dentist.

When considering a mouthguard and which type might be best, be sure to talk with a dentist or orthodontist about your specific needs. Custom-made, professionally fitted mouthguards are recommended in adults and in teenagers after all their baby teeth are gone. However, 'boil and bite' mouthguards may be used by younger age groups who have not yet shed all their baby teeth. For these children, you should get the 'boil and bite' type adapted by the dentist. This will make sure that they get the best possible fit to achieve a good level of protection.

Mouthguards and orthodontic braces

Anybody who wears an orthodontic brace and who needs a mouthguard should consult their orthodontist.