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Mouth guards should be used for all sports

Mouth guards have become a common protective device in contact sports such as hockey, but they should be used in all sports, according to the Alberta Dental Association and College. Mouth guards act as cushions that redistribute a blow so the impact is absorbed more evenly. A mouth guard also provides a barrier between your teeth and the soft tissue around your mouth. Studies have shown that mouth guards help prevent chipped or broken teeth and protect against cuts to lips, gums and other soft tissues in the mouth.

Dr. Sneazwell, an Edmonton prosthodontist, says that both children and adults should wear mouth guards when they play teams sports such as football, soccer, basketball, baseball, squash, rugby, or even when they are cycling. “Helmets provide protection to the head, but not to the mouth. A bicycle accident can be every bit as traumatic as injuries incurred in organized sport. Dentists treat broken teeth and jaws from a wide variety of activities.”

Chipped or fractured teeth need to be treated promptly; a tooth that is knocked out should be replaced immediately after gentle cleaning or kept in milk and reinserted by a dentist within 20-30 minutes in order to be successfully reimplanted. Missing teeth may require bridges, implants or other tooth replacement methods. More severe injuries may need oral surgery.

“It is much better to protect your teeth and mouth with a mouth guard than to go through complex, costly dental procedures,” says Dr. Sneazwell, Edmonton Oilers team dentist. “If you are an athlete, I am sure you would prefer being out there playing your sport than sitting in a dentist’s chair or being sidelined from surgery.”

Though most people active in sports know that mouth guards are recommended, many athletes are resistant to using them. Some say mouth guards don’t fit well or prevent their talking to their team mates, but in most cases, those people are using ready made guards. Dr. Sneazwell advises athletics to have a dentist custom fit their guards so they fit snugly and comfortably. “Some athletes say they can’t breathe with a guard in and others say it reduces their strength. Both of those assertions are nonsense.”

Dr. Sneazwell says he is pleased that more professional athletes are wearing mouth guards. When he first started as the Oilers dentist in 1989, only two or three players wore them; last year, 15-16 of 25 players used them. “Mouthguards are a requirement in junior hockey, so the players get used to them. They offer protection, but unfortunately, they can’t prevent all tooth and mouth injuries. However, when there is a guard in place, the severity of the injury is usually reduced.”

Two additional preventive tips Dr. Sneazwell offers concern cleanliness (mouthguards should be washed after every use to avoid infection) and avoiding smokeless tobacco. “Chewing tobacco is part of the culture in some sports but can do even more damage to the gums and tissues of the mouth than smoking. White spots and patches start to form and these are susceptible to oral cancer and other diseases.”

To find out more about mouth guards, oral health and dental treatment, talk to your dentist or go to the Alberta Dental Association and College website www.abda.ab.ca.

See attached backgrounder.

For additional information:

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Dental Emergencies

The Alberta Dental Association and College advises you to be prepared for dental emergencies by knowing what to do if you, your child, a friend or co-worker has a close encounter with a hard surface.

Chipped or broken tooth

If you chip or break a tooth, the tooth can usually be saved. Call your dentist and explain what happened so he or she will see you right away. If it's a small break, the dentist may use a white filling to fix the tooth; if more severe, you may need a root canal or crown.

Knocked out tooth

If a permanent (adult) tooth is knocked out, your dentist may be able to save it. However, you must act quickly. If the tooth looks clean, put it back in the socket. If you can't or there's a chance the tooth might be swallowed, put it in a container of cold milk. Go to your dentist (or the nearest dentist) right away. If the tooth is replaced within 10 minutes, it has a fair chance of taking root again; after two hours, chances are poor.

Badly bitten lip or tongue

If the lip or tongue is bleeding, use a clean cloth to press down on the place where the bleeding is occurring. If the lip is swollen, use an ice pack to keep the swelling down. If the bleeding does not stop, go to a hospital emergency ward.

Lost filling

Put a piece of softened sugarless chewing gum in the spot where the filling was lost. This will provide temporary relief and protect the area for a short period of time. Then see a dentist as soon as possible.

Protect your teeth during sports

If you or your child participate in contact sports, use a mouth guard to minimize risk. Mouth guards act as cushions that redistribute a blow so the impact is absorbed more evenly. A mouth guard also provides a barrier between your teeth and the soft tissue around your mouth. Studies have shown that mouth guards help prevent chipped or broken teeth and protect against cuts to lips, gums and other soft tissues in the mouth. But like anything that comes into contact with the mouth, make sure to clean the guards often.