



Protecting Children's Teeth During Sports

How to Prevent Dental Injuries in Young Athletes

Why Is Dental Protection Important?

Sports and recreational activities are excellent ways for children to stay healthy and active. However, they also increase the risk of injuries to the teeth, lips, tongue, and jaw.

Many sports-related dental injuries are preventable. Wearing the appropriate protective equipment—especially a **properly fitted mouthguard**—can significantly reduce the risk of serious dental trauma.

Protecting children's teeth during sports helps preserve their oral health and may prevent costly or complex dental treatment.

How Common Are Sports-Related Dental Injuries?

Dental injuries are among the most common facial injuries in children and adolescents participating in sports.

Common injuries include:

- Chipped teeth
- Broken teeth
- Loose teeth
- Knocked-out permanent teeth
- Cuts to the lips or tongue
- Jaw injuries

Prompt treatment improves the chances of saving injured teeth.

Which Sports Carry the Highest Risk?

Dental injuries can occur during almost any physical activity, but the risk is higher in:

- Football
- Basketball
- Hockey
- Soccer
- Baseball
- Softball
- Wrestling
- Martial arts
- Skateboarding
- BMX and mountain biking
- Gymnastics
- Lacrosse

Even non-contact sports may involve accidental collisions or falls.

What Is a Mouthguard?

A **mouthguard** is a protective device worn over the teeth during sports and recreational activities.

It cushions impacts and helps protect:

- Teeth
- Gums
- Lips
- Tongue
- Jaw
- Surrounding soft tissues

Mouthguards are considered one of the most effective ways to reduce sports-related dental injuries.

Types of Mouthguards

Custom-Made Mouthguards

Custom mouthguards are made by a dentist using impressions or digital scans of the child's teeth.

They offer:

- The best fit
- Maximum comfort
- Better protection
- Easier breathing and speaking

Custom-made mouthguards are generally recommended for children who participate regularly in organized sports.

Boil-and-Bite Mouthguards

These mouthguards soften in hot water and are shaped at home.

They usually provide a better fit than stock mouthguards but may not fit as precisely as custom-made appliances.

Stock Mouthguards

Stock mouthguards come preformed and are ready to wear.

Although inexpensive, they often:

- Fit poorly
 - Feel bulky
 - Make speaking difficult
 - Provide less protection
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Should Children Wear Mouthguards for Braces?

Yes.

Children wearing braces are still at risk for dental injuries.

A mouthguard helps protect:

- Teeth

- Brackets
- Lips
- Cheeks
- Soft tissues

Your orthodontist or dentist can recommend the most appropriate type of mouthguard.

Wearing a Helmet Is Also Important

For activities such as:

- Cycling
- Skateboarding
- Scootering
- Rollerblading
- Skiing
- Snowboarding

A properly fitted **helmet** helps reduce the risk of head and facial injuries.

Helmets and mouthguards provide different types of protection and are often recommended together.

What Should You Do If a Tooth Is Knocked Out?

A knocked-out **permanent tooth** is a dental emergency.

If possible:

- Hold the tooth by the crown, not the root.
- Gently rinse it with clean water if dirty.
- Do not scrub the tooth.
- If possible, place it back into the socket.
- If that is not possible, store it in cold milk or an approved tooth preservation solution.
- Seek emergency dental care immediately.

Quick action greatly improves the chance of saving the tooth.

Do not reinsert a knocked-out baby tooth, as this may damage the developing permanent tooth underneath.

Caring for a Mouthguard

A mouthguard should be:

- Rinsed after each use
- Cleaned regularly with cool water and a soft toothbrush
- Allowed to air dry
- Stored in a ventilated protective case
- Checked regularly for damage

Replace the mouthguard if it becomes:

- Torn
 - Cracked
 - Worn
 - Too small as your child grows
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Tips for Parents

Parents can help protect their child's smile by:

- Encouraging mouthguard use during sports.
- Making sure helmets fit properly.
- Scheduling regular dental checkups.
- Replacing damaged mouthguards.
- Teaching children what to do if a dental injury occurs.

Developing safe habits early helps reduce the risk of lifelong dental problems.

Common Myths

"Only contact sports require mouthguards."

False.

Dental injuries can occur in both contact and non-contact sports due to falls, collisions, or accidental impacts.

"Baby teeth don't need protection."

False.

Healthy baby teeth are important for chewing, speech development, and guiding the eruption of permanent teeth.

"A helmet protects the teeth."

False.

Helmets protect the head and brain but do not adequately protect the teeth. A mouthguard provides additional protection for the mouth.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Sports-related dental injuries are common but often preventable.
 - ✓ A properly fitted mouthguard is one of the best ways to protect children's teeth.
 - ✓ Custom-made mouthguards generally provide the best fit and protection.
 - ✓ Children wearing braces should also wear mouthguards during sports.
 - ✓ Helmets and mouthguards protect different parts of the body and are often used together.
 - ✓ Prompt dental care is essential if a permanent tooth is chipped, loosened, or knocked out.
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