

Sports Safety



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Despite the new innovations in mouth and face guard technology, many athletes still subject themselves to needless sports-related injuries to the mouth and face.

Members of the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons would like to see helmets, face masks and mouth guards—every kind of safety gear that reduces the risk of injury—become standard pieces of athletic equipment.

GUARD AGAINST INJURIES

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons are the specialists called in to treat the broken jaws, splint the loosened teeth and replant the knocked-out tooth. Every day they treat the painful results of needless sports-related injuries. That's why oral and maxillofacial surgeons support the mandatory use of safety equipment. As always, prevention is the best policy.

PROTECTION IS THE BEST PREVENTION

Elaborate protective equipment is available for sports that involve contact and present a greater probability of injury. Among these sports are:

Football. Helmets with face guards and mouth guards should be worn. Many of the helmets manufactured for younger players have plastic face guards that can be bent back into the face and cause injury. These should be replaced by carbon steel wire guards.

Baseball. A catcher should always wear a mask. Batting helmets with a clear molded plastic face guard are now available; these can also be worn while fielding.



Ice Hockey. Many ice hockey players are beginning to wear cage-like face guards attached to the helmet. These are superior to the hard plastic face masks worn by some goalies as the face guard and the helmet take the pressure of a blow instead of the face. For extra protection both face and mouth guards—including external mouth guards made of hard plastic and secured with straps—can be worn.

Wrestling. More and more high school athletic associations require wrestlers to wear head gear. A strap with a chin cup holds the gear in place and helps to steady the jaw. Recently, face masks have been developed for wrestlers who have suffered facial injuries. Mouth guards should also be worn by wrestlers.

Boxing. Mouth guards are mandatory in this sport. A new pacifier-like mouth-guard for pugilists has been designed with a thicker front, including air holes to aid breathing.

Lacrosse. Hard plastic helmets resembling baseball batting helmets, with wire cage face masks, are manufactured for this sport.

Field Hockey. Oral and maxillofacial surgeons recommend that athletes participating in this sport wear mouth guards. Goalies can receive extra protection by wearing Lacrosse helmets.

Soccer. Soccer players should wear mouth guards for protection. Oral and maxillofacial surgeons advise goalies to also wear helmets.

By encouraging athletes to wear mouth guards and other protective equipment, oral surgeons hope to help change the “face” of sports.

In the event that a facial or mouth injury occurs which requires a trip to the emergency room, the injured athlete, his parent or coach should be sure to ask that an oral and maxillofacial surgeon is called for consultation. With their background and training, oral and maxillofacial surgeons are the specialists most qualified to deal with these types of injuries. In some cases, they may even detect a “hidden” injury that might otherwise go unnoticed.

CHANGING THE FACE OF SPORTS

From their experience with athletes—ranging from NFL All-Pros to Olympians to the kid playing sandlot ball—oral and maxillofacial surgeons recommend that athletes participating in such sports as basketball, soccer, water polo, handball, rugby, karate, judo, gymnastics and horseback riding, be fitted with mouth guards.

New synthetic materials and advances in engineering and design have resulted in mouth guards that are sturdier yet lightweight enough to allow ease of breathing. Mouth guards can vary from very inexpensive “boil and bite” models to custom-fabricated guards made by dentists, which can be adapted to the sport and are generally more comfortable.

A mouth protector should be evaluated from the standpoint of retention, comfort, ability to speak and breathe, tear resistance and protection provided to the teeth, gums and lips.

There are five criteria to use when being fitted for a mouth protector. The device should:

- cover the upper and/or lower teeth and gums;
- be fitted so that it does not misalign the jaw and throw off the bite;
- be light;
- be strong; and
- be easy to clean. ●



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