



# Paedodontic Society of South Africa

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## Let me ask you Doc?

### Mouthguards for the prevention of facial injuries

by Dr. Bradley Selvan (Private Practice)

by Professor Francois de Wet (Deputy Dean, School of Dentistry, University of Pretoria)



Perhaps the most valuable piece of sporting equipment that you can purchase for your child is a correctly made, custom fit mouthguard. Not only for obvious contact sports like rugby and boxing (compulsory to wear a mouthguard) but also for any sport where trauma to the face is possible e.g. hockey, soccer etc. Trauma due to a collision, a bat, a ball, a fist, or the ground are all equally damaging and can have dire consequences.

Mouthguards protect the teeth from fracture, not only the visible front teeth but the back teeth as well. Teeth, unlike skeletal bones, are unable to repair themselves. A fractured upper front incisor or any other tooth is damaged forever! Although there are ways to repair or replace these valuable teeth, the old saying that “nothing is as good as your own” is especially true with regard to your teeth and smile. Prevention with a mouthguard is cheaper and better than any cure.

Mouthguards can also prevent concussion and death. Trauma/force to the lower jaw forces it upward against the top jaw- causing concussion or jarring of the brain. Today concussion is considered to have occurred even if loss of consciousness is for a fraction of a second. Damage to the brain within the bony confines of the skull, can result in nausea and vomiting, headaches and if severe enough, can cause loss of respiratory reflex, swelling, bleeding and even death.

Not all mouthguards are equal and adequate and they must be manufactured accurately in order to effectively protect the teeth and mouth. They must be thick enough to protect and cushion against the enormous forces of trauma. Some will need wire strengtheners and/or extra sheets of plastic to be effective. Generally they need to be at least 2 mm thick. The better they fit the more comfortable they will be and the easier they will be tolerated by the wearer. Although one can buy “generic” mouthguards from sport shops, which can be heated and moulded in the mouth, they are generally inadequate, because they fit poorly and provide little protection.

We recommend that you have a mouthguard made by your dentist. Your dentist will take an impression of your upper jaw, which will be cast into a stone model. Onto this upper model, the mouthguard is made, when heated and thin pliable sheet/s of plastic are sucked onto the model, in a vacuum. Various designs and strengtheners can be built into the mouthguard, if necessary. Cost of these mouthguards is more expensive compared to store bought mouthguards but they are really worth every cent!

The cost to repair a broken tooth is ten times more than a mouthguard. The cost to repair a broken jaw or a lost tooth is much higher. Who can begrudge the cost when you consider the consequences of brain damage, or death, because a proper mouthguard was not worn?