



Tooth Talk

by Mary Ellen Volansky, RDH, MS

What is Sports Dentistry? – or – What do Concussions Have to do With Our Teeth?

In contact sports, whether with persons or objects, trauma can occur to our jaw. Many injuries to our mouth are cut lips or tongue, or broken teeth or jaw. Damage also can occur to existing dental work – crowns, bridges, porcelain veneers, and dental implants.

So how does a concussion happen? Have you experienced the head of a sleepy child falling against your mouth or cheek? Ouch. Now picture the head of a 250-pound running fullback or center-back/sweeper doing the same.

Considering that our mandible is moveable, an impact to our mouth can drive it up against our head in front of our ears. This impact transmits the force of that 250-pound human being to our head and then our brain, sometimes causing a concussion.

In which sports might this happen? All contact sports: basketball, baseball, football, soccer, hockey, field hockey, lacrosse, rugby, water polo, martial arts, roller hockey, volleyball, and boxing. And other sports where an object is what a jaw might come into contact with: racquetball, skiing, squash, surfing, tennis, handball, gymnastics, skateboarding, riding scooters, and bicycling.

A mouth guard is a plastic device that athletes wear in their mouths to reduce injury to the jaw, teeth, tongue,

and brain. When I began my research on this subject, I thought mouth guards were “just” a device. You know, the ones those hulking sports players hang from their helmets. Was I wrong!

There are three types of mouth guards. The “ready-made” or “stock” mouth guard is bought at the store, ready to wear. It’s also the type provided to patients of this clinic – more on that later.

There is the “boil-and-bite” mouth guard. This one will mildly adjust to a person’s mouth. Before you use it, you warm it. You then place it into your mouth. Because it’s soft, it will shift somewhat to your bite. This mouth guard also is purchased at the store.

The most expensive type is the “custom made” mouth guard. It’s custom made by a dentist to fit your mouth and teeth. This type is especially useful for people with missing teeth and/or bridges, implants, and crowns. It should stay in your mouth better and be more comfortable to wear.

All three provide protection. They vary in comfort, protection, and cost. The bottom line for mouth guards? Be sure to wear one.

If you have braces, get a mouth guard designed for people with braces.

It will additionally aid in protecting the inside of your cheek and lips from the metal brackets attached to your teeth. This guard also allows room for your brackets. Plus, it guards both the upper and the lower jaw.

Mark McCullough, DMD, MS, an IHS orthodontist, says that persons with braces should **not** use a “boil-and-bite” or a “custom-made” mouth guard. These two specific guards do not allow for the movement you want your teeth to make because of the braces. He recommends, and this clinic hand outs, Ultra-Guard by Sports Mouthguard.

When playing sports, do not wear removable appliances (retainers, complete or partial dentures). Take them out and store them in a safe place.

Wash your mouth guard with soap and cold water before and after each use. Warm or hot water can warp it. Then brush with toothpaste or mouth rinse for a fresh taste.

When not using your mouth guard, place it in a ventilated container so it can dry out and remain dry.

Washing it regularly and keeping your mouth guard dry will decrease the number of bacterium and molds growing on it. These organism cause odors, just like they do inside your mouth. So

be sure to wash your mouth guard (and your mouth) before and after each use.

Do not share your mouth guard with anyone. Soap and water are not enough to prevent the spread of germs.

Don’t leave a mouth guard in hot places – the dashboard of your car, in the sun, on a stove or heater, or place in hot water. The warmth could melt it or cause it to lose its shape. Warning – keep all oral appliances out of reach of your pets.

One last caution about any mouth guard you purchase. Be sure that you can speak and breathe with it in your mouth.

Check the tribal Web page (www.ctsi.nsn.us) for links to more information on mouth guards and sport injuries to the mouth. Once on the page, click Tribal Services, then Health Care, then Clinic, then Dental, and finally Tooth Talk Updates.

Please let me know what you would like to see covered in future Tooth Talk articles. E-mail about this or related Tooth Talks can be sent to siletzorallhealth@yahoo.com.

Summarized from What To Do For Healthy Teeth, Sadie S. Mestman, DMD, and Ariella D. Herman, Ph.D., pages 103-105, 2004.

Contact Information for Various Veterans Services

Referral Numbers

	Location	Phone Number	Fax Number
Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs	Salem	1-800-692-9666	
Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs	Portland office	503-412-4777	503-412-4785
American Legion	Portland VA Office	503-412-4771	503-412-4772
Disabled American Veterans	Portland VA Office	503-412-4750	
Paralyzed Veterans of America	Portland VA Office	503-412-4763 or 1-800-795-3627	
Veterans of Foreign Wars	Portland VA Office	503-412-4757	
Portland VA Regional Office	(Check the status of claims)	1-800-827-1000, ext. 10	
Lincoln County Veteran Services Office	Newport	541-574-6955	

Medical Facilities

		Phone Number	Fax Number
Portland VA Medical Center	(Check enrollment status)	1-800-949-1004, ext. 55069	
Portland VA Medical Center	(Appointment line)	1-800-949-1004, ext. 53494	
Portland VA Medical Center	(Refill line)	1-800-949-1004, ext. 55201	
Pharmacy fax line	(Order new prescriptions)		360-905-1776
Cascade Call Center	(Refill problems, appointments other than primary care)	1-888-233-8305, option 1	
Roseburg VA Medical Center	Enrollment Office	1-800-549-8387, ext. 44024 or 44577	
Roseburg VA Medical Center	Prescription refills	1-800-549-8387, option for refill line will be given	
Salem CBOC		1-800-949-1004, ext. 55300	
Salem Mental Health	Outpatient clinic	503-220-8262, ext. 55300	
Health Revenue Center	Billing questions (Mon.-Fri., 6 a.m.-6 p.m.)	1-866-290-4618	

DAV van rides from Florence, Yachats, Waldport, Seal Rock, South Beach, Newport, Depoe Bay, Lincoln Beach, Lincoln City, and Otis to Portland/Vancouver VAMC and back. Portland VAMC Transportation, Neil Horton, 1-800-949-1004, ext. 57804 or 56957. Give a 48-hour notice. 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Mon.-Fri.

DAV van must leave Portland VAMC no later than 3 p.m. Please alert the scheduling staff at the medical center that you will be taking the DAV van and the staff will try to schedule your appointment(s) accordingly.