

# Make sure your student athlete gets a mouthguard

By KIM GLOVER, R.D.H.

Mouthguards to protect an athlete's teeth are commonplace in contact sports such as football and rugby. But they are also a smart idea for people participating in sports like basketball, baseball, wrestling, soccer, motocross and rodeo. A mouthguard can protect lips, teeth, and braces from a stray elbow or a softball that misses the outfielder's glove. Some researchers even believe that a mouthguard may help prevent or reduce concussion of the brain from a blow to the lower jaw.

Ready-made mouthguards are available everywhere, from your favorite sports store to drugstores or online. Prices range from \$3 to \$25 and up. It is important to select a mouthguard that is well-



cushioned, yet slim enough to allow easy speaking and breathing. Boil-and-bite guards are preferred to guards that aren't made to mold to the teeth.

Custom mouthguards are usually made in a dental office. These should fit better than most guards purchased in a store, and are a nice

option for the year-round athlete.

Your child may be able to choose her favorite color, or the team's colors for her mouthguard.

These devices usually cost more than a readymade guard; call your dental office to find out what the fee would be. Also, ask your dental office if they are doing any mouthguard clinics, where they may offer special pricing on the guards.

When taking care of a mouthguard, remind your child to brush it now and then with cool or warm water and a toothbrush without toothpaste. Don't store it where it may be exposed to extreme heat, such as in the front seat of a car parked in the sun. And keep the guard away from pets. Dogs love to chew on retainers and mouth-



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guards that smell like "their people." A brightly-colored plastic case will make your child's guard easier to find in a bag crammed with smelly socks and T-shirts.

Replacing missing or broken teeth can be a very long, expensive process. A mouthguard is not just a good preventive measure; it's a low-cost insurance policy for your child's smile.

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