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WHAT IS A DENTAL GUM SHIELD?

FOR DR. ROZE BIOHEALTH CLINICS | 01 NOVEMBER 2022

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A gum shield is a protective appliance or device that is used to cover the teeth and gums. A gum shield is more commonly known as a **mouth guard**. We hear dentists and hygienists stress the importance of maintaining our teeth and gums in our daily activities to ensure we remain fit to carry them out efficiently.

The Gum Shield and its importance

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It's called a gum shield because it shields the gums, lips, and teeth from the negative effects of teeth grinding or jaw clenching. Gum shields also protect from injury in case of impact (if used in contact sports like wrestling, boxing, baseball, martial arts, gymnastics, softball, handball, hockey, skating, basketball, and football).



This device is fixed on the teeth of either the upper or lower jaw, or both. The gum shield, aka mouthguard, pads between the lower and upper teeth. This can also help reduce the risk of concussion, which may arise when the bottom jaw slams into the upper one, rattling the skull and causing a shock.



For these reasons, it's always recommended that one should wear a properly fitted gum shield –and make sure that it extends to the molars, as it's even more helpful this way.

It helps prevent tooth loss and/or lip biting too. Do not cut the ends of your mouthguard just to make it look like you have one in during games. If you find gum shields to be very uncomfortable, simply get a custom-made guard fitted to your dental anatomy and request for a thin version.

How does gum shield work?

As mentioned above, we “the people”, like to make our own language confusing. As a result, the mouthguard is also known by other names:

- gum guard,
- gum shield,
- mouth piece,
- bite splint, bite plane
- mouth protector,
- night guard,
- occlusion splint,
- teeth guard, dental guard, and teeth protector.

Some of the names are more commonly used in a medical setting (such as occlusal splint and bite splint). Mouth guards are worn to protect the teeth and the gums because of susceptible injury from teeth grinding and impact during sports. There exist some differences between gum shields for sports and bite splints for teeth grinding.

There are also several types of gum shields:

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1. **Boil & bite mouth protectors.** These are made from thermoplastic material. One would first place them in hot water to soften them, then submerge them into their teeth, and by use of their finger and tongue, pressure the right-shaped guard around the teeth. These types can be purchased in many sporting good stores.

2. **Stock mouth protectors.** These are also sold at many sport good stores, but have already undergone preliminary shaping. They're generally the least expensive type. They come ready-to-wear with no ability to conform to your teeth. Consumers usually complain a lot about this type of mouth guard. The most common complaints are: "too bulky", "makes talking and breathing a challenge", and "little can be done to adjust their fit". Their use is therefore not recommended by most dentists.

3. **Custom-fitted mouth protectors.** This type is designed according to an individual based on dentist's instructions. The dentist first makes an impression of one's teeth, then a mouth guard is designed according to the impression, using special materials. This process is time consuming – with more is involved, making the procedure more expensive than any other mouth guard types. But, it provides the most protection and best comfort. It's the best mouth guard solution for teeth grinding as the durability is beyond comparable.

There are two different machines used to create custom-fitted mouth protectors:

- **Vacuum form, custom-made gum shields.** The use of this machine produces single layer mouth protectors. They offer more protection than the boil & bite type.
 - **Pressure laminated, Custom-made mouth guards.** This type of machine produces a multi-layer material for varying thicknesses and a tighter fit.
- Generally, gum shields cover ones upper teeth only, but most dentists will make them for the lower teeth as well.
A properly trained dentist can suggest the best mouth guard for you to to use.
 - An effective mouth guard should be long-lasting, easy to clean, comfortable, tear-resistant and should not interfere with one's breathing or speech.
 - If you grind your teeth at night, a special gum shield type of dental appliance known as the *nocturnal bite plate* or *bite splint* may be designed for you to prevent tooth damage.

When would I need a mouthguard?

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It is important to wear a professionally made mouthguard whenever you play sport that involves physical contact or moving objects. This includes: cricket, hockey and football - which can cause broken and damaged teeth; and American football, boxing and rugby - which can all cause broken or dislocated jaws. A mouthguard will help protect against these happening.

Where can I get one made?

Our dental team will be happy to make you a custom-made mouthguard, which will fit your mouth exactly and protect your teeth and gums properly. Custom-made mouthguards can prevent damage to the jaw, neck and even the brain - helping to prevent the concussion and damage caused by a heavy blow.

How long do custom-made mouthguards last?

- Depending on your age, your mouthguard may need replacing fairly regularly. If you are still growing, new teeth will come through and move into position. So the mouthguard may become too tight or loose, and will need to be remade to fit the new shape of your mouth.
- Adults may not need to have their mouthguards replaced quite so often. But they are like any other form of sports equipment and will suffer from wear and tear. It is recommended that you take your mouthguard along to the dentist when you go for your check-up, so it can be checked.

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