Mouth Guards are a Must for Sports Related Gift Giving

Help the Athletes in Your Life Protect their Teeth on the Field, Say Orthodontists

If a hockey or lacrosse stick is on the holiday wish list, the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) is suggesting parents or grandparents tuck another gift in the package – a mouth guard. Orthodontists, and all dental professionals, recommend the use of a mouth guard for all sports to athletes of all ages. With various winter sports now in full swing and the holidays around the corner, it is a great time to pick up a mouth guard for your favorite athlete. Great as a Christmas stocking stuffer or Hanukkah present, something as simple and affordable as a mouth guard can protect smiles and prevent sports-related dental injuries.

Each year, two million teeth get knocked out due to sports-related injuries such as a baseball to the mouth. Sports injuries are the main source of tooth and mouth injuries in older adolescents and adults. Up to 40% of dental injuries in older adolescents and adults occur while playing sports, according to WebMD and the American Dental Association (ADA).

In some cases these injuries result in permanent damage to the jaw teeth or surrounding facial bones. Surprisingly, dental injuries are one of the most easily avoidable sports injuries. Yet a recent study commissioned by the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) found that 87 percent of parents stated that their children do not wear a mouth guard during organized sports.

A mouth guard may be one of the least expensive pieces of protective gear available to young athletes, and it can provide a lifetime of savings — especially when you compare the cost of a mouth guard to the cost of losing a tooth. Restoration for a single tooth can cost into the thousands of dollars over a lifetime, according to Robert E. Varner, DMD, and president of the American Association of Orthodontists.

There are three basic types of mouth guards:

- **Customized** — The best choice for protection and comfort, a customized mouth guard is made by an orthodontist or dentist from a mold of the patient's teeth, creating the most secure, tightest fit for the athlete.
- **Ready-to-wear** — In-stock and ready-to-wear mouth guards are available at many sporting goods stores. While they do not offer the comfort of a customized or a boil-and-bite mouth guard, they do provide better protection than no mouth guard at all.
- **“Boil and bite”** — Available at most sporting goods stores, a boil and bite mouth guard is “mouth-formed” to the athlete’s teeth by boiling in water then biting for a personalized fit.

Athletes in orthodontic treatment should consult their orthodontists about the appropriate mouth guard to be worn while in orthodontic treatment.

Orthodontists recommend that a mouth guard should be worn during all practices, games and recreational activities in general. To find out more about mouth guards and facial protection, visit www.mylifemysmile.org.

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About the American Association of Orthodontists: Founded in 1900, the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) is the world’s oldest and largest dental specialty organization. It represents more than 17,000 orthodontist members throughout the United States, Canada and abroad. The Association encourages and sponsors key research to enable its members to provide the highest quality of care to patients, and is committed to educating the public about the need for, and benefits of, orthodontic treatment.

Orthodontists are uniquely qualified specialists who diagnose, prevent and treat dental and facial irregularities to correctly align teeth and jaws. After graduating from dental school and then completing the required two-to-three years of specialized education in an accredited orthodontic residency program, orthodontists are eligible for membership in the AAO.

For more information about orthodontics or to find AAO member orthodontists in your area, please visit mylifemysmile.org.