

# THE IMPORTANCE OF MOUTH AND FACIAL PROTECTION

by Tarkan Sidal, DDS, MD



It's that time of year again – April is National Facial Protection Month. Leading organizations such as the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS), American Dental Association (ADA), American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

(AAPD), American Association of Orthodontists (AAO), and the Academy for Sports Dentistry (ASD) work together to create public awareness of the importance of wearing protective gear to guard your face and mouth while playing sports. Spring may bring positive sentiment to our daily lives, but it traditionally also brings us many patients suffering with head, face, and mouth injuries resulting from sports accidents. Many injuries can be easily prevented with the use of safety equipment like helmets, face guards, and mouth guards.

The head and face are integrated anatomically in such a way that statistically, when injuries occur, sinuses will absorb a frontal impact similar to airbag technology or “crumple zones” in modern cars. This design protects the subject from a more serious brain injury, but at the expense of the facial fractures. Wearing protective head and face gear will give you an extra level of protection.

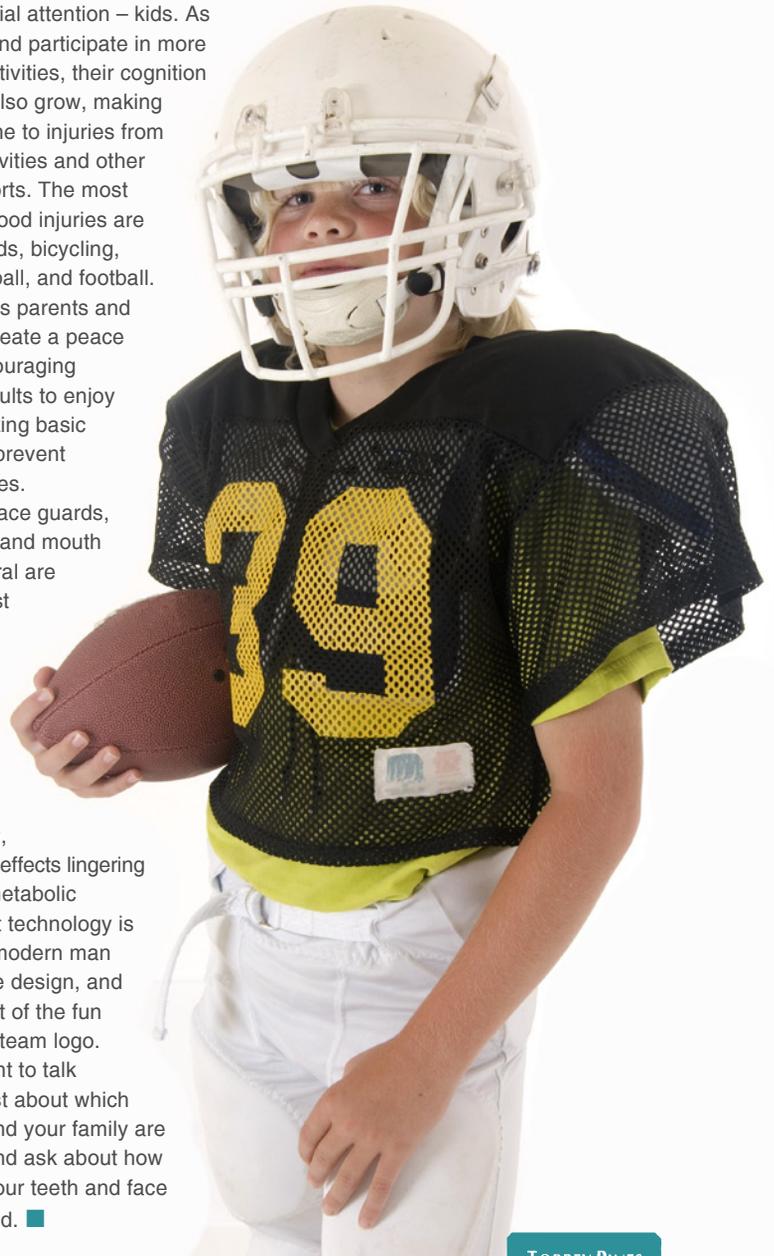
Mouth guards protect the teeth from being knocked out and fractured, and also prevent injuries to the bone, tissues enveloping them, and the jaw joints. Having a mouth guard constructed takes just one easy visit to your dentist's office. After a mold is made of your teeth's impressions, your custom mouth guard will be ready for use at the following visit. A mouth guard not only protects teeth but also allows for normal speech and breathing. Also, protecting your eyes with impact resistant goggles will protect two of your most important organs.

There are numerous published studies that recognize the importance of injury patterns by age. In adults, with aging, healing from trauma changes somewhat but the pattern of

injury generally doesn't. There is an age group of patients with traumatic injuries that needs our special attention – kids. As children grow and participate in more independent activities, their cognition and judgment also grow, making them more prone to injuries from playground activities and other age-related sports. The most common childhood injuries are from playgrounds, bicycling, soccer, basketball, and football. It is important as parents and caregivers to create a peace of mind by encouraging children and adults to enjoy sports while taking basic precautions to prevent unwanted injuries.

Helmets, face guards, eye protection, and mouth guards in general are significantly cost efficient when compared to the medical costs of an injury; not to mention the psychological burden of injury, which can have effects lingering long after the metabolic healing. Helmet technology is another gift to modern man with its versatile design, and can also be part of the fun by adding your team logo.

It is prudent to talk with your dentist about which activities you and your family are interested in, and ask about how to make sure your teeth and face can be protected. ■



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