



# WATCH YOUR MOUTH!

*By Donna Paris*

**We talked to Dr. Charles Goldberg and Dr. Marvin Lean, team dentists for the Toronto Maple Leafs, about mouthguards — vital equipment for professional hockey players and weekend athletes alike**

**W**e all know the benefits of wearing mouthguards – they protect the teeth from fractures, but they may also help prevent concussions and protect the upper jaw from fractures, according to Dr. Charles Goldberg and Dr. Marvin Lean, team dentists for the Toronto Maple Leafs. “There are some things you just don’t think of,” says Dr. Goldberg. “You think if someone gets hit by a puck or a fist or a stick, it’s just going to break their teeth, but if the blow is severe enough, other things can happen.” Teeth can be pushed up or pushed back into the palate, he adds.

So, mouthguards are a good thing. But is it necessary to get one custom-made? “There’s no comparison between the two,” says Dr. Goldberg. Custom mouthguards fit perfectly, covering the teeth and providing the most protection. A good fit means they will not slip off the teeth, fall back and block the airway, and they also allow the player to be better able to communicate with their teammates, he says.

Despite young children playing hockey and wearing full cages, mouthguards are still recommended. “If they get hit, the mouthguard protects them from the initial blow and helps to absorb the shock,” says Dr. Lean. “Custom-made mouthguards provide the best comfort and protection. Mouthguards don’t last forever and need to be checked for fit and wear regularly and replaced as required,” he says.

To make custom mouthguards, an impression is taken, then a lab fabricates the mouthguard from the impression and model. This method provides the best fit. “It captures all the imprints in the mouth and picks up all the undercuts, which help to hold in the mouthguard,” says Dr. Lean.

“Using the best mouthguard material and a proficient lab with experience in making mouthguard fabrication is very important, as is custom trimming and adjustments, so each works optimally for the player,” explains Dr. Goldberg.

One point Dr. Goldberg makes is that it’s not just kids playing hockey who need mouthguards. He emphasizes anyone playing a contact sport or sport with a ball, racquet or stick should wear mouth protection, and, of course, in hockey, the best protection for the mouth would be to wear a cage attached to the helmet.

And don’t forget the fun factor! With customized mouthguards, there are many options. “For [professional] players, we’ve made all kinds for special events,” says Dr. Lean. “One player wanted a pink mouthguard because the game was being dedicated to breast cancer. We’ve also had players who have requested numbers, names and other decals on them, too.”

A question that both dentists get asked all the time is why NHL players have their mouthguards hanging out of their mouths and why they chew on their mouthguards sometimes while they’re sitting on the bench. “It’s just a habit,” says Dr. Lean. “So, there are some players who need five or six mouthguards each year because they chew through them, and others will need one for the entire season.”

The bottom line? “Mouthguards are important,” says Dr. Goldberg. 

