



SPORTS

# DENTISTRY

Guidelines for  
elite athletes

LEADING THE WORLD TO OPTIMAL ORAL HEALTH



## What is oral health?

Oral health means the health of the mouth. A healthy mouth allows you to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow and convey a range of emotions with confidence and without pain, discomfort and disease. A healthy mouth also lets

you practice the sports of your choice without disruption. No matter how old you are, oral health is vital to your general health, well-being and athletic performance.

## ORAL HEALTH MEANS HAVING HEALTHY:



## Why does oral health matter?

Oral disease can affect your athletic performance and your general health. For example, gum disease can increase your risk of diabetes, heart disease, and pneumonia. Taking care of your mouth keeps it healthy and helps you maintain your general health, which is essential when practicing sports.

## How can oral health affect my performance?

The mouth is often considered as a mirror of the body: a healthy mouth contributes to a healthy body that behaves smoothly and efficiently. Conversely, an unhealthy mouth can affect your athletic performance in several ways:

- Poor oral health can affect your quality of life and well-being, two elements that are important for good athletic performance.
- Cavities (tooth decay) and periodontal (gum) diseases can cause or maintain inflammations and infections in your body, with a negative effect on your athletic performance.
- Defective dental occlusion can affect your posture and gait, which can increase your risk of injury.
- A dental emergency, such as a gum abscess, infected tooth, or wisdom tooth eruption before an athletic competition can cause you to perform poorly, or even withdraw. Dental care must be provided immediately after screening to avoid emergency interventions.



OF THE 399 ATHLETES EXAMINED DURING  
THE 2012 LONDON OLYMPIC GAMES:

**40%**

WERE 'BOTHERED'  
BY THEIR ORAL  
HEALTH

**28%**

REPORTED AN  
IMPACT ON QUALITY  
OF LIFE

**18%**

REPORTED AN  
IMPACT ON  
TRAINING AND  
PERFORMANCE

## How can sports affect my oral health?

Practicing sports can affect your oral health in many ways: dehydration, stress, and the sugars and acids contained in sports food and beverages can all negatively impact your oral health. Physical impacts can also cause oral injuries.

- Sports beverages and some energy supplements contain lots of sugars and acids, which can cause caries and increase the risk of periodontal (gum) disease and tooth erosion.
- Sports-related stress is an additional risk factor for caries, periodontal (gum) disease, tooth erosion, abrasion and bruxism (teeth grinding).
- Oral and dental trauma and injuries can happen frequently when practicing contact and combat sports without proper protection.
- Dehydration and stress can lead to dry mouth, which can negatively affect your oral health.
- In aquatic sports, the low pH of swimming pool water may cause tooth erosion.



OF THE 399 ATHLETES EXAMINED DURING THE 2012 LONDON OLYMPIC GAMES:

**55%**

HAD DENTAL CARIES

**45%**

HAD MODERATE  
TO SEVERE TOOTH  
EROSION

**76%**

HAD PERIODONTAL  
DISEASE  
from localized to  
generalized gingivitis

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT MOUTHGUARDS PREVENT BETWEEN 100,000-200,000 ORAL INJURIES PER YEAR IN PROFESSIONAL AMERICAN FOOTBALL ALONE.

# What can I do to protect and preserve my oral health?

## ➤ BRUSH YOUR TEETH

**Brush your teeth and gums at least twice a day for two minutes** (30 minutes after eating). Use a toothbrush, fluoride toothpaste and flosses/interdental brushes. Rinse with water or chew sugar-free gum after meals and snacks when brushing isn't possible.



## ➤ VISIT YOUR DENTIST

**Visit your dentist at least once a year** for a complete check-up. Your dentist may apply fluoride varnish to protect your teeth.

## ➤ MEDICATION

**Make sure that any dental medication you may be taking is compatible with physical exercise** and anti-doping policies. Illicit soft drugs can harm your health if consumed regularly.



## ➤ DO NOT SMOKE

**Avoid smoking and smokeless tobacco.**

## ➤ EAT RIGHT

### Eat a healthy diet.

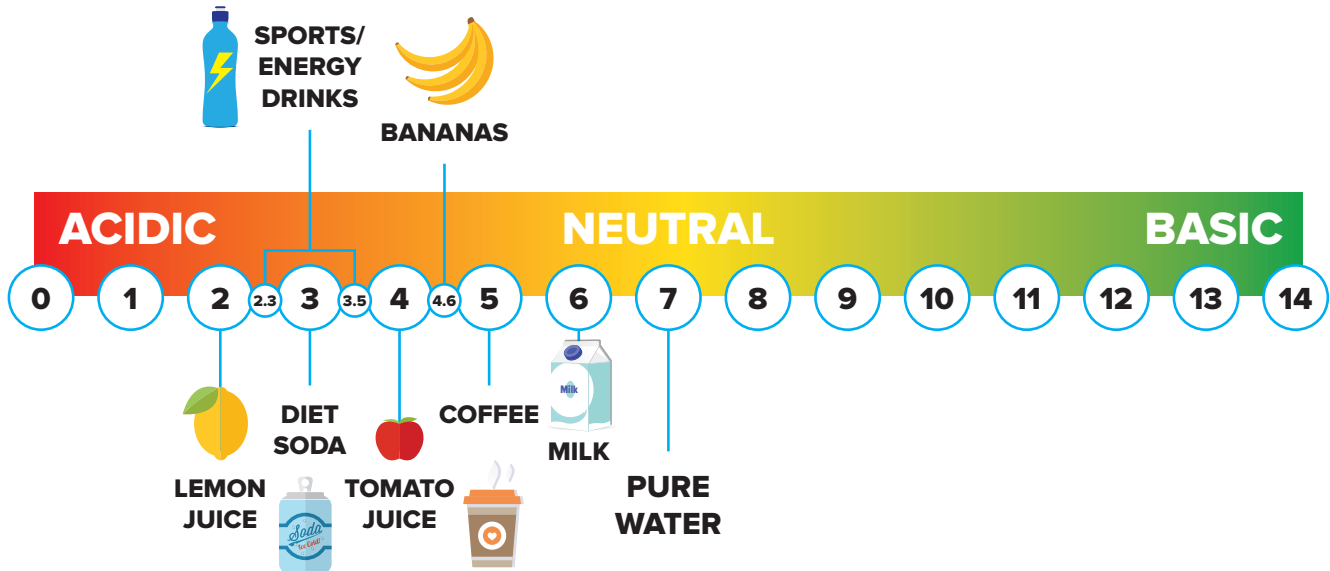
When snacking between meals, choose fruit, quark/'fromage blanc' cheese, and nuts over foods that are more likely to cause caries, such as cookies.

Beware of acids: counteract the acidity of energy drinks and food by rinsing your mouth with water afterwards. When drinking a sports beverage, use a reusable straw to avoid contact with your teeth and dilute energy drinks with water. Do not brush your teeth immediately after drinking energy drinks.

Stay hydrated by regularly drinking water throughout the day.



### pH VALUES





## ► PROTECT YOURSELF

**Wear a mouthguard when engaging in contact sports.**

Avoid store-bought, standard mouthguards that do not fit well and offer poor protection. Favour custom-made mouthguards. For children and adolescents whose mouths are still developing, it may be appropriate to use standard mouthguards that will then be adapted by the dentist. Do not hesitate to ask your dentist for advice.



### Examples of sports where protection is

#### MANDATORY

- » Boxing
- » Taekwondo
- » Ice hockey
- » American football

#### RECOMMENDED

- » Martial arts
- » Rugby
- » Basketball
- » Handball
- » Volleyball
- » Baseball
- » Football/Soccer
- » Cycling
- » Gymnastics
- » Equestrian sports
- » Skateboarding
- » Wrestling
- » Weightlifting
- » Squash
- » Water polo
- » Field hockey/  
roller hockey





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## Find out more

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