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Dentist plays defence for hockey mouths

Let's face it, a trip to the dentist isn't one of the most exciting events in the life of youngsters.

While 12-year-old Russell Graham says he doesn't mind going to the dentist, he admits his last visit was the best.

Graham plays hockey with the Clarkson Hurricanes atom red team of the Mississauga Hockey League and the purpose of going to the dentist a few weeks ago was to be fitted for a unique mouth guard.



Smile. Russell Graham sports his new custom mouthguard with his number and team logo manufactured by a local dentist. Part of the proceeds of the new mouthguards will be donated to the players team.

Photo by: Claudio Cugliari

"It felt like a bunch of jello in my mouth," said Graham, a Grade 7 student at St. Therese of the Child Jesus in Meadowvale, describing the impression method used to make the device. What Graham got back five days later was his own pressure-laminated mouth guard, complete with the Hurricanes' logo imbedded in it. "My teammates said it looked cool," said Graham, who scored a goal and added an assist in Clarkson's 4-2 win over Erindale Saturday afternoon.

The idea of the of the personalized mouth guard came from Dr. George Christodoulou, the president and co-CEO of Altima Dental Canada, a national dental group that has a clinic at the Erin Mills Town Centre. "Mouth guards act like a cushion, helping to absorb the impact of a blow more evenly," says Christodoulou, who has two sons of his own playing minor hockey. "It helps protects you from concussions," said Graham, who started wearing a mouth guard in hockey games and practices three years ago. "They're good because we have hitting now (at the atom level)." Christodoulou agrees with the youngster. "Not only do they lower the risk of broken teeth, but they can play a role in preventing concussions," he said.

Research by dental organizations indicates that mouth guards are just as important in protecting against injuries as pads and helmets. Christodoulou explains that the force of a hit to the jaw travels to the brain. A mouth guard, he says, can absorb a lot of the shock from the hit and help shield the brain. "When you get hit, you bang your teeth together," said Graham. "It happened to me a couple of times today (Saturday)." Altima is waiving its fees and providing the customized mouth guards at their cost of \$75. It is also donating \$10 of that to the team or league of the player's choice. The offer expires at the end of October.

Visit altima.ca or call **1.888.81SMILE** to book your mouthguard fitting.