

Healthy Halloween Treats

Halloween is a festive day that kids enjoy, because they get dressed up and get treats.

Enjoy the holiday with your kids, but carefully plan what you will do at your house to assure that healthy eating habits are practiced. This can be challenging, since the goal of most children is to get as much Halloween candy as possible for their own private stash.

Help kids enjoy Halloween without overindulging. If you and your family eat sensibly all year, then kids know how to make wise decisions when they are tempted to overindulge with unhealthy foods.

Don't send your children trick-or-treating on an empty stomach. Make sure they eat a good healthy meal beforehand to reduce the urge to snack.

Trick-or-treat bags that children carry should be appropriate to their size. Older kids can carry larger bags, but not as large as a shopping bag or plastic garbage bag.

Limit the houses your children can visit to a two or three block radius. That way the treats will most likely come from neighbors and friends, and the moderate amount of treats will be manageable.

Instruct children to wait until they get home to eat any of their goodies so that you can inspect them first. Let them keep only treats that are wrapped commercially. Inspect and throw away any commercially wrapped treats with signs of tampering—tears in wrappers, tiny pinholes, unusual appearance or discoloration.

You don't have to pass out high calorie candy to trick-or-treaters at your house this year. Give them a

variety of fun, non-candy alternatives to promote health rather than encourage unhealthy choices.

Healthy Trick-or-Treat Alternatives

Childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate, doubling over the past 30 years. Eating in moderation and becoming more physically active could reduce obesity rates in children.

When trick or treaters ring your doorbell, what will you give them? Try nutritious, tasty foods and non-food options, including items that get children up and moving to use the extra calories they consume.

Make Halloween a healthier and more inclusive holiday for children and adolescents with diabetes and other health-related dietary restrictions by offering non-sugar treats.

Healthy Food Treats: Think outside the box when choosing treats for trick-or-treaters or party-goers. The calories in all those bite-size Halloween treats add up quickly. Four "bite size" chocolate bars contain approximately 320 calories, 25 jelly beans have 140 calories, and 20 pieces of candy corn add up to 100 calories.

There are other treats that are lower in fat and sugar but may provide vitamins, minerals and fiber. The possibilities for healthy food treats are endless. Set a good example for your own children and the neighborhood kids by passing out healthy treats like these instead of giving them candy.

- cereal bars
- snack packets of dried fruit, baked pretzels, nuts and seeds (e.g. peanuts*, unsalted almonds, sunflower seeds or pumpkin seeds)
- trail mix

- packages of low-fat crackers with cheese or peanut* butter filling
- animal crackers
- gold fish crackers
- graham crackers
- Cracker jacks
- 100 calorie packs of various products
- beef or turkey jerky
- single serve boxes of ready-to-eat cereal
- raisins and chocolate covered raisins
- fig cookies
- sugar-free gum or hard candy
- gummy candies made with real juice
- mini boxes of raisins
- individual juice drinks (100% juice)
- snack pack pudding
- Jello with fruit
- applesauce
- bean dip
- single-serve packets of low-fat microwave popcorn
- sugar-free hot chocolate or apple cider packets

*Be careful of peanut allergies.

Fresh fruits (e.g. apples, bananas and oranges) are very nutritious treats, but they are no longer safe options. Remember that individually wrapped items are best.

If you choose candy for treats, look for those that are lower in fat and sugar. Choose bite-size candy bars based on the least amount of fat and calories per serving. Better choices are: 3 Musketeers; 100 Grand Bar; Butterfinger; Milky Way; Raisinets; Starburst and York Peppermint Patties. In addition, consider healthier dark chocolate versions.

Non-food Treats: Children also will enjoy non-food treats** like the items typically given in birthday goodie bags.

- small toys and pocket-sized games
- glow sticks
- costume jewelry (plastic rings, necklaces and bracelets)
- funny Halloween glasses
- false teeth
- miniature magnifying glasses
- tiny decks of cards

- small stuffed animals
- pencils
- pencil toppers and fancy erasers
- markers
- stickers, including reflective safety stickers
- rub-on or stick-on temporary tattoos
- bookmarks
- crayons
- coloring tablets
- paint brushes
- pages from coloring books
- children's magazines or comic books
- bottles of bubbles
- coins (pennies, nickels, dimes)
- fake money
- whistles
- toothbrushes
- used books
- coupons from a yogurt store or juice bar

**Some treats fit all ages, but small items should be limited to kids over age three.

Treats to Promote Activity: Encourage kids to be more physically active by giving small, inexpensive toys to get them up and moving.

- a bouncy ball
- a jump rope
- sidewalk chalk for drawing a hopscotch or foursquare game
- a beanbag for hacky sack
- a plastic or foam flier

What To Do With Treats Brought Home

Parents or a supervising adult should inspect all Halloween treats before children eat them. When in doubt, throw it out!

Halloween is the perfect time to teach children moderation in eating. Help kids include their treats in a healthy eating plan, set limits on when and how much candy they can have, and stick to those limits.

Inventory your children's candy, and don't let them eat too many treats at once. Let kids choose a few pieces of candy to eat on Halloween night and then eat a few pieces each day after that. Forbidding or restricting candy may cause them to develop patterns of hoarding and obsession with candy.

Teach kids that sweets can fit into their diet in limited amounts, maybe as part of a certain meal, as a snack with a fruit, etc. Combine a treat, such as a miniature candy bar, with a healthy snack like an apple. Make sure the child eats the apple first so they are less hungry for the treat. This provides them with the health benefits of the apple while teaching them healthier eating habits.

Most candy has a long shelf-life. Put the “treat stash” out of children’s reach and limit them to eating about two pieces of candy a day. Larger treats, such as chocolate candy bars, can be cut into smaller pieces and frozen. Pull them out weeks or months later for some bite-sized treats.

If your child comes home with too much candy and sweet treats, arrange a buyout. Pay a nickel or dime for each sweet treat they “sell” you, and let them “earn” money for a toy or game they want to buy.

Kids with diabetes can have a few sweet treats, too. The rule is moderation with foods high in carbohydrate, including sweets and starches. Suggest that the child choose a few favorite treats and trade in the rest for money or a present.

Remember that sugary Halloween candy contributes to tooth decay. Candies do far more damage to teeth than to wrecking diet or behavior. Tooth brushing and flossing are extremely important after eating sweets or any foods that stick to the teeth.

Familiar Foods With a Halloween Theme

If you have the time, host a Halloween dinner with spooky background music. Here are some ideas for putting a special Halloween face on familiar foods that you frequently serve.

Jack-O-Lantern Pizzas: Make mini-pizzas from your favorite recipe. Top with shredded cheese and let children make jack-o-lantern faces with bits of cut-up black or green olives. Bake as usual.

Or, pat purchased refrigerator biscuits into 4-inch circles and top with pizza sauce, shredded cheese and olive eyes, etc. as described above. Bake on a greased baking sheet in an oven that’s been preheated to 350° F. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until crust is lightly browned.

Ghosts: Serve a mound of mashed potatoes on each child’s plate with two slices of black olives positioned near the top for eyes. Prepare mashed potatoes with low-fat or fat-free milk and soft or liquid margarine to reduce the fat and calories. If served the traditional way with milk and butter, they will have about 200 calories per ½ cup serving.

Another edible ghost can be made with popcorn. Wrap a small popcorn ball in plastic wrap. Place wrapped ball in the middle of a large, sturdy white napkin. Tie the napkin together over the popcorn ball with white string, so the ends of the napkin hang out to form the body. Draw on a scary face with a black marker.

Jack-O-Lantern Burgers: Top hamburgers with a cheese slice into which you’ve cut out a jack-o-lantern face (eyes, nose and mouth).

Monsterwiches: Have available an assortment of bits and pieces of various vegetables, such as: carrot shavings (use a vegetable peeler to shave off thin strips of carrots); small slices of black and green olives; slices of red pepper (for lips); shredded lettuce, etc.

Let children spread a piece of bread with cheese spread or peanut butter and add these toppings to make a monsterwich.

Brains With Blood and Pus: Serve spaghetti and marinara sauce with shredded cheese, and call it “brains with blood and pus.” Kids will love eating “gross” food on Halloween, and you will know they are getting a healthful dinner.

Halloween Pasta: Check grocery stores, food specialty stores or craft stores for pasta that comes in Halloween shapes. Use in your favorite pasta recipe.

Witches’ Smiles: Core and cut a red-skinned apple (leave skin on) into long, vertical slices, about ½ ” wide. Spread one side of apple with a small amount of peanut butter and place on top of a second slice so it looks like the two lips of a mouth. Stick raisins between the red “lips” for “decayed teeth.” If you make ahead of time, coat any exposed flesh of the apple with a little orange or pineapple juice to keep apple from turning brown.

Halloween Party Popcorn: Combine popcorn with your choice of the following ingredients. By mixing Halloween candy with popcorn, you cut back on the total amount of candy offered. Serve with a scoop from a large bowl. Or, fill a self-closing sandwich bag with popcorn mixture for each child.

- raisins and other dried fruit
- candy corn
- nuts
- gummy worms
- orange/black candies such as “M & M’s” or jelly beans

Popcorn is a good choice for healthy eating. A cup of popcorn (popped) contains only 31 calories when popped without added fat. Popcorn provides fiber, or roughage, that the body needs in the daily diet.

Bony Fingers: Pour popcorn into clear plastic gloves (the type designed for wearing in the kitchen when preparing food). Tie the ends of gloves with orange and black ribbon.

Witches’ Brew: Serve orange juice or apple juice topped with a small scoop of orange sherbet, vanilla ice cream or frozen yogurt. Or, add a few drops of green food coloring to milk, then top with a small scoop of lime sherbet, vanilla ice cream or frozen yogurt, if desired.

Murky Blood: Combine nutrient-rich cranberry juice, apple cider and orange juice.

Halloween Cookies: Mix red and yellow food coloring until you have an orange color. Mix a few drops into your favorite sugar cookie dough. Cut dough into pumpkin shapes and bake as usual.

A second option is to let children help decorate sugar cookies with orange colored frosting. Make faces with chocolate chips, raisins or dried fruit bits.

Halloween Party Ideas

Select a harvest theme, focusing more on fun and less on food. Get children up and moving to use the calories they have consumed. Party activities could include: dunking for apples; walking through a

haunted house; a hayride; a bonfire; decorating pumpkins; pinning a heart on a scarecrow; a costume contest; face painting and temporary tattoos. The children would love to paint you, too!

Offer kids fruits and vegetables of the season: pumpkin muffins; pumpkin pie; pumpkin cookies; hot apple cider; popcorn or baked apples. A plain apple is a very healthy, low-calorie food in the 60-100 calorie range. However, be aware that a large candy apple with caramel contains about 540 calories.

Conclusion

Show children how much you care about them. Give them treats that help them choose wisely today and begin a lifetime of healthy habits. Teach them the importance of making smart choices from each food group, selecting nutrient-dense foods, and getting plenty of physical activity to balance their food intake.

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