

What to Do With All That Halloween Candy

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This may be the one day of the year where children with otherwise healthy eating habits turn into sugar goblins. And although Halloween in Salem is no doubt a unique experience, the question of what to do with all the candy is one that is asked by parents across the country.

Many parents panic that by letting their kids indulge in Halloween treats they are setting them up for a lifetime of candy eating, obesity and dental carries. They envision their children hoarding hundreds of candy bars in pillowcases under their beds for months, to be snacked on whenever and wherever the child chooses. However, by setting a few ground rules (yet remaining flexible and realistic), you can indeed have a wicked good Halloween.

One of the best strategies for reducing the amount of candy your child can eat is to focus on other aspects of Halloween than just the sweet stuff. Try setting a moderate time limit on trick or treating, and instead focus on other ghoulish activities such as a haunted house, a ghost walk, or bobbing for apples. “Children caught up in the thrills of other Halloween activities are less likely to be obsessed with bags of candy,” says Dr. Debby Demory-Luce, a nutritionist with the Children’s Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Another strategy is to encourage neighbors to give non-food treats, such as snazzy pens or stickers that kids can use at school. You could also rally the neighbors to give out the mini bars rather than the full size ones, in an attempt to keep sweets at a more controlled level (however, personal experience has taught me that word quickly spreads among kids as to who’s giving out the “good stuff” and who’s not).

In your efforts to add a shred of healthiness to this sugar-crazed holiday, however, you may want to steer clear of making up a batch of homemade healthy treats. “Although you may be tempted to cook up your favorite popcorn balls or cookies, keep in mind that most parents will be reluctant to let their kids eat them,” writes Sue Gilbert, MS, a nutrition writer for Parentsplace.com.

The other reality is that even if you take great pains to offer healthy Halloween fare, your kids will undoubtedly find a way to arrive home with a sack full of wicked sugary treats. When this happens, allow your child to have a few pieces of Halloween candy that night, and store the rest somewhere out of sight. Go through the bag with your child and discard any wrappers that look broken or suspicious. If you are concerned about dental carries, remove hard candies to a from your child’s pile (these candies sit in the mouth for a longer period of time, encouraging tooth decay).



Many parents find that kids are satisfied with eating just a few pieces of candy after trick or treating, and saving the rest to eat gradually. In the ensuing days, allow the child to have one or two pieces as an appropriate dessert after meals, and encourage teeth brushing afterwards to minimize the risk of cavities.

The idea is not to be overly restrictive, but to emphasize that these candies are sweet treats that can be enjoyed in moderation. “Learning to make good food choices is instrumental for children to develop self control and healthy eating habits,” says Demory-Luce.

Some parents tend to “skim off” of the Halloween candy themselves; if you are frustrated that your cupboard is starting to look like Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, consider bringing in a portion of the candy to your office, or else donate it to a senior center or a community group.

If you are concerned that your child has a weight problem, try not to be overly restrictive on this one night a year. Many an overzealous parent has caused their children to begin hiding food or eating in private for fear of being criticized or restricted. It is also a bad idea to use the candy as a reward for good behavior, as this sets the child up for powerful food associations that can be problematic later on.

Probably the best approach I have heard to managing this night of nights was aptly summed up by one veteran mother: “Damage Control”. Remember that flexibility is key, and in the long run, one night of eating will not significantly impact your child’s health.