



Managing Halloween and the candy monster

Think of Halloween as a great occasion to play dress-up extraordinaire, and try to take a moderate stand on the candy. Candy is mostly sugar and fat so we have to realize that it contributes calories with few nutrients, but it is a big part of this holiday and it is fine in moderation. Preference for sweet foods is not a human failing — it's simply human nature.

In general, candy should not be forbidden and restricted. Children must learn about moderation and frequency so that we don't teach patterns of hoarding or becoming obsessed. As parents we must make sure that children know when sweets are appropriate in their diet, and that should be adhered to throughout the holiday season.

Here are some suggestions for managing a happy and healthy Halloween:

1. Wait and buy candy later rather than sooner. With Halloween candy on the grocery store shelves two months prior to the event, it's difficult to resist the fun-sized treats, but we can't eat what we don't bring home.
2. Feed kids a healthy meal before they go out to a party or trick-or-treating so they won't replace dinner with candy.
3. Host a pre- trick-or-treat Halloween dinner with spooky background music. Hand out a printed menu with gory descriptions of kids' favorite foods. For example, spaghetti and marinara sauce with shredded cheese becomes "brains with blood and pus." Nutrient-rich cranberry juice mixed with apple cider and orange juice becomes "murky blood." Kids really love the idea of eating gross food on Halloween, and parents are satisfied knowing that their kids are actually just eating a healthy dinner.
4. If you're hosting a Halloween party, make it a seasonal festival. Serve pumpkin muffins and spiced apple cider, and have the kids dunk for apples. There are plenty of games and activities that don't involve candy — decorate little pumpkins, hold a costume contest, visit haunted houses or show a spooky movie with some fresh-popped popcorn.
5. Offer alternatives to candy. Serve healthy treats such as popcorn, granola bars, trail mix, raisins or pretzels. Or hand out non-food items like pencils, rings, bracelets, stickers, crayons, plastic snakes, bouncy balls — the items that we typically give kids in birthday goodie bags. Just be aware of choking hazards with young kids.
6. Limit the houses that children visit. Give them a two to three block radius, so they are able to gather a moderate amount of treats only from known neighbors and friends.

Once the candy stash has been acquired, it remains in the house for days or weeks after Halloween has passed. Here are tips for maintaining healthy habits after the holiday:

1. Limit the amount of sweets you and your children have each day. Moderation is key. Use this time to teach your children the importance of eating a nutritious diet while still being able to enjoy treats on special occasions.

2. Avoid keeping candy where it is easily accessible, for example, in a candy jar on your desk or in a bowl on the kitchen counter. Storing it out of sight makes it less of a temptation and helps prevent mindless eating.
3. Save leftover candy for another time. It could be used to decorate gingerbread houses at Christmas time or for an art project. Chocolate could be frozen and used for baking when needed.
4. Instead of just snacking on candy, add it to a nutritious snack mix with whole grain cereal, nuts and dried fruit. These foods contain fiber, which help you feel full and satisfied.
5. Remember to stay physically active. Exercise helps with weight management and improves overall health. As we enter the holiday and cold weather season, it's important for the whole family to maintain healthy habits like exercising.
6. Emphasize that brushing and flossing our teeth after eating sweets or any foods that stick to the teeth is extremely important. Candy does far more damage to our teeth than it does to our diet or behavior.

With a no-big-deal approach and the emphasis being on moderation, candy can be enjoyed without being considered a “forbidden fruit.”