



Weller Health Tip for Parents: Healthy Halloween Habits

With the chance to dress up in costume and stock up on sweets, Halloween is the highlight of the year for many kids - from toddlers to teens.

But since it's high season for candy, it can also be an frustrating time for parents who encourage kids to eat healthy foods and make sweets a limited part of a balanced and nutritious diet.

On the one hand, you want to let kids indulge and enjoy the holiday. On the other, you don't want to undermine all the work you do the rest of the year maintaining a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle. And you don't want to confuse kids with mixed messages.

Parents were asked to share how they handle Halloween. Most mom and dads - 82% - set limits using a variety of strategies to keep kids from going overboard on the Halloween treats.

Many parents said that after letting kids indulge in some treats right after trick-or-treating, they limit their kids to a certain number of pieces each day or put the candy stash out of reach and out of sight. Then kids have to ask for it - that is, if they remember that it's there!

One parent tried to limit the amount of sweets while also making sure that it was served up alongside something healthy. "They are allowed to select three items per day from the bag stored in the refrigerator, and they must have a glass of milk or water for each treat. After a week, they usually lose interest in the candy - maybe just coming from the fridge it doesn't taste as good or is harder to chew with the item being cold. Or by the time it comes to room temperature, they've gotten full!"

Of parents who try to limit treats, most said that they successfully kept their kids from overindulging. Those who said that their efforts failed cited a variety of reasons - from kids finding parents' secret hiding places to kids creating secret hiding places of their own. Other parents said that a big obstacle was having different caregivers for kids, from grandparents to babysitters, with different rules for the candy.

Just 15% of parents said that they offered trick-or-treaters healthy non-candy alternatives, ranging from bags of pretzels to small toys like yo-yos and temporary tattoos. About 37% said that they offered toys and candy. Nearly half of all parents just gave out candy.

Tips From Other Parents

Parents had a number of good tips to share about candy-limiting schemes that had worked in their houses, ranging from using the candy for craft projects to trades with their kids' dentists for small toys.

Here are some other tips from moms and dads:

- "Feed them before they go out to discourage snacking while out."
- "Tell them about the Halloween Pumpkin that will come by and leave a toy in place of the bag of candy."
- "Toss out the most brightly colored candy!"
- "Let kids know ahead of time the limits and reasons for those limits."
- "Remind the kids that if they don't eat it all now, they'll have more for later. Encourage sharing the

candy with friends. Not only does it thin out the candy supply, it enforces sharing."

More Tips and Tactics

Use your best judgment given what you know about your child's personality and eating habits. Before kids go trick-or-treating, try to serve a healthy meal so they're not hungry when the candy starts coming in.

Kids who generally eat just a couple of pieces and save the rest might be trusted to decide how much to eat. But if your child tends to overdo it, consider setting limits.

Other insights for handling Halloween treats:

1. Consider being somewhat lenient about candy eating on Halloween, within reason, and talk about how the rest of the candy will be handled. Candy and snacks shouldn't get in the way of kids eating healthy meals.
2. If a child is overweight - or you'd just like to reduce the Halloween stash - consider buying back some or all of the remaining Halloween candy. This acknowledges that the candy belongs to the child and provides a treat in the form of a little spending money.
3. Be a role model by eating Halloween candy in moderation yourself. To help avoid temptation, buy your candy at the last minute and get rid of any leftovers.
4. Encourage your kids to be mindful of the amount of candy and snacks eaten, and to stop before they feel full or sick.

Here are some ideas for alternatives to candy to give to trick-or-treaters who come to your door:

- non-food treats, like stickers, toys, temporary tattoos, false teeth, little bottles of bubbles and small games, like tiny decks of cards (party-supply stores can be great sources for these)
- snacks such as small bags of pretzels, sugar-free gum, trail mix, small boxes of raisins, and popcorn
- sugar-free candy
- small boxes of cereal
- Steer clear of any snacks or toys - like small plastic objects - that could pose choking hazards to very young children.

And remember that Halloween, like other holidays, is a single day on the calendar. If your family eats sensibly during the rest of the year, it will have a more lasting impact than a few days of overindulgence.

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