

Halloween Health Tips

How much Halloween candy?

Nearly half of the added sugar in the American diet comes from sugary drinks. Added sugars come from baked goods, candy cereals, desserts, and dairy products. It is recommended, by the American Heart Association (AHA), that sugar is limited to 6 teaspoons or 25 grams per day for children over two. A fun-sized candy bar, like Snickers, has about 2 teaspoons of sugar. That is one-third of a child's total daily recommended intake. The AHA reports that children consume three times the recommended amount each day. Halloween, many children's favorite day of the year, is a day that worsens the sugar statistics, which are already alarming.

What is the harm of candy?

One study published by the AHA found that high-added sugar diets are strongly linked to obesity, insulin resistance, weight gain, abnormal cholesterol, and fatty liver disease in children. These all increase the risk for type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease later in life.

Too much Halloween candy - now what?

Set a limit to how much candy your child can eat instead of confiscating the whole bag. For example, have them pick 25 of their favorite pieces and add that to their lunch every day. You may ask, "What am I supposed to do with all the extra candy?" Well, many communities have places to donate the extra sweets. Dentists and pediatricians often have candy buy-back incentives. For example, if the candy is donated to a dentist's office, they may give out prizes or money for every pound turned in. The office may donate the candy to a charitable organization.

Food allergies

Around Halloween, sugar is not the only villain. Food allergies in children are more prominent than ever and can be a nightmare for parents. The Food and Allergy Research and Education organization (FARE) estimates that 5.9 million children have at least one food allergy. That translates into one in every 13 children having a food allergy. Many food allergies are life-threatening; any candy with a possible allergen is unsafe to come into contact with.

The Teal Pumpkin Project

The Food and Allergy Research and Education organization has started a program known as The Teal Pumpkin Project to bring awareness to food allergies, so all children have the opportunity to enjoy Halloween. Putting a teal pumpkin outside your house symbolizes a house that offers non-food treats. Passing out non-food treats is an excellent option because even children with no food allergies enjoy it! Some ideas include novelty toys, glow sticks, Halloween-themed pencils, erasers, or costume jewelry. You can register your house at tealpumpkinprojec.org to let your neighbors know your house is allergy friendly this year. Do not forget to add a teal pumpkin to your porch too!

Healthier treats

Consider creative ways to turn up the fun and dial down the sugar! Maybe you want to promote nutrient-dense snack choices. Consider passing out applesauce “monster” cups adorned with googly eyes. Offer clementine oranges decorated like Jack O’ Lanterns. If you don’t have time to decorate, your local stores have lots of alternatives. Bags of trail mix, boxes of raisins, and bags of pumpkin-shaped pretzels are all healthier pre-packaged options dressed for the occasion.

(sources: calorieking.com; extension.msu.edu; foodallergy.org; heart.org;