

Daily Union Article
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Title: Healthy Tricks for Treats

It's Halloween weekend and for many that means they will have Trick or Treaters at their door. For others, it means they will have buckets and sacks of candy lying about from the bounty of our children's Halloween enjoyment. It doesn't take long for the taste buds to become overwhelmed with the sugar and chocolate. Perhaps this situation lends itself to an article about healthy snacking.

Enjoy Halloween with your kids, but take some time to plan out what you will do at your house to assure that healthy eating habits are not compromised in the process. Albeit not an easy task, helping your children accept both healthy and sugar dense treats equally can help reduce the nutritional imbalance that often occurs.

Helping children enjoy Halloween without overindulging starts long before the holiday arrives. Teaching children to make health food choices daily throughout the year will help them minimize their desire to binge on sweets for the holidays. Another step parents can take is making sure that children go trick-or-tricking after eating a filling healthy meal beforehand to reduce the urge to munch on their goodies.

Select trick-or-treating bags relative to the size of a child. A small child should carry small bag while older kids should carry a larger container. Avoid sending kids out with large shopping bags or plastic garbage bags.

Limiting the amount of time your children are out trick-or-treating can also help with reducing the amount of candy they accumulate. Additionally, parents can limit the number of houses or target a specific area for their children to trick-or-treat.

Another trick to use with their treats is to direct children to wait until they get home to eat any of their goodies. This serves two important purposes. First, this will give parents the opportunity to sit down with their children to inspect the treats they received. Keep the treats that are wrapped commercially, while throwing away any of those that have broken seals or show signs of tampering – tears in wrappers, small pinholes, unusual appearance or discolored wrappers. Use this tried and true rule of thumb “When in doubt, throw it out!”

If you plan to keep your light on for trick-or-treaters at your own home, consider alternative treats to high calorie candy. You can give them either consumable non-candy alternatives or non-consumable fun treats. Check out the chart at the end of this article for some specific examples.

What can a parent or guardian do to help children manage their treats when they get home? Halloween provides a perfect opportunity to teach children moderation in eating. Help kids include their treats with a healthy eating plan, set limits on when and how much candy they can have, and be consistent in following those limits.

Parents need to be aware of how much and what kinds of treats their children have accumulated. Also be aware of how quickly their candy disappears by holding them to the limits you set. Let kids choose a few pieces of candy to eat on Halloween night and then ration the rest out in the days that follow. Forbidding or being overly restrictive with candy may cause them to develop patterns of hoarding or obsession with candy.

Fit the treats in after eating a healthy snack or meal. If a child comes home from school wanting a snack, guide them to grab a banana or apple before eating a miniature candy bar. Eating the healthy snack first will help fill them up and make them less hungry for the treat. It also provides them with the health benefits of the fruit while teaching them how to focus on healthier eating habits.

Since most candy has a long shelf-life, parents and guardians would be wise to put the Halloween bounty out of the children's reach and limit them to eating about 2 pieces of candy a day. If there are larger treats in the stash, cut them into smaller pieces and freeze the leftovers to be eaten later.

If your child comes home with too many sweets, arrange a buyout. You can trade their excess "inventory" for a toy, game or even money. This will eliminate them from feeling like their bounty was simply taken from them.

Halloween is a fun time for kids and adults alike. However, just like most things in life, moderation is the key. As a parent or guardian, it helps to be involved and engaged with your children as they enjoy this kid-centered holiday. Use the season to build positive and fun memories with children while also guiding them in healthy eating habits.

For more information about healthy eating habits, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

Consumable Treat Alternatives	Non-consumable Treat Alternatives
cereal bars	glow sticks
snack packets (dried fruit, baked pretzels, nuts, seeds)	costume jewelry (plastic rings, necklaces, bracelets)
trail mix	funny Halloween glasses
packages of low-fat crackers with cheese filling	false teeth
animal crackers	miniature magnifying glasses
goldfish crackers	pencils
graham crackers	pencil toppers and fancy erasers
100 calorie packs of various products	markers
beef or turkey jerky	stickers, including reflective safety stickers
individual juice drinks (100% juice)	bookmarks
snack pack pudding	toothbrushes
single-serve packets of low-fat microwave popcorn	bottles of bubbles
sugar-free hot chocolate or apple cider packets	whistles
raisins and chocolate covered raisins	crayons
single serve boxes of ready-to-eat cereal	pages from coloring books