

Trick-or-Treat Tips for a Healthier Halloween

The tradition of giving out candy on Halloween can be traced back to the 9th century Celtic celebration of Samhain. During this end-of-harvest festival, people built bonfires and offered treats to wandering spirits in hopes of appeasing them and warding off evil. Over time, traditions evolved—jack-o-lanterns were carved out of turnips, and potions were brewed in cauldrons.

Fast forward to today: We decorate our homes, dress in costumes, and open our doors as kids dash around neighborhoods, collecting candy by the handful.

If only the Celts could see us now. Last year alone, U.S. consumers spent a staggering \$3.6 billion on candy in October, rivaling the spending during December. The Celts would be shocked (and frankly, so should we) at how much sugar we consume and the alarming disease rates linked to this addiction. In fact, 85% of what we spend on healthcare is related to preventable diseases, and it's clear that reducing our sugar consumption could help curb the rise of metabolic diseases, obesity, cardiovascular issues, cancer, and tooth decay (also known as Caries Disease). Tooth decay, though listed last, actually tops the charts as the most prevalent disease worldwide across all age groups and all sociodemographic.

But don't worry, I'm not here to ruin Halloween fun! Instead, let's explore some simple strategies to help your family navigate the candy craze with a little less risk to your health this year.

Tips for a Healthier Halloween:

- **Limit Frequency:** The more frequently your child consumes sugar, the higher the risk for tooth decay. Encourage them to enjoy their candy as dessert after meals rather than throughout the day.
- **Portion Control:** Large amounts of sugar cause blood sugar spikes. Ask your kids to choose just one or two pieces of candy for dessert rather than indulging in a full-on candy binge.



- **Avoid Sticky Candies:** Sticky, chewy candies are the worst for teeth—they squeeze into tiny grooves and “stick around” long after the treat is gone. Explain this to your kids, and encourage them to avoid the gummy or chewy ones.
- **Know When to Stop:** Once your child's candy pile starts to dwindle and the excitement wears off, it's okay to pitch the rest. Remember, you're the decision-maker when it comes to your family's health.
- **Try a Candy Buy-Back:** A day or two after Halloween, consider offering a candy buy-back. Pay your kids for their leftover candy, allowing them to use the money on something else they'll enjoy. Then, toss candy altogether.
- **Hand Out Healthier Alternatives:** This year, try offering non-candy treats at your door. Think outside the box with items like glow sticks, playing cards, bubbles, multi-colored markers, or fidget spinners. These can be just as fun and memorable as candy.

With a few small changes to your Halloween traditions, your family can still enjoy the holiday while fostering healthier habits. Here's to a fun—and healthier—Halloween!



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