

Just try it

Sugar Overload!

Strategies for a More Healthful Halloween

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When October rolls around, I think of shorter days, pumpkin bread and Halloween, which marks the beginning of sugar overload all the way to January. It is a challenging time for parents who have worked diligently to provide healthy meals and don't want their efforts wiped out by a barrage of unhealthy choices promoted by advertising, school parties and junk food.

The good news is there are many foods to offer as snacks, to share at school parties and to hand out to trick-or-treaters that are festive *and* healthy. Some of my favorites are Ghost Bananas, Fruit Cup Pumpkins, Mandarin-Orange Pumpkins, and Ghost Hard-Boiled Eggs. These snacks are simple to make and work great at home, in lunch bags and for school parties.

■ **Ghost Bananas:** Cut bananas in half. Place dried currants, raisins or chocolate chips at the pointed end of each banana for eyes and a mouth. Place a dollop of peanut butter (or cream cheese for those with nut allergies) on the flat portion of the banana and stick upright on a plate. Kids think these are great fun.

■ **Fruit-Cup Pumpkins:** With a black Sharpie, draw a jack-o-lantern face on the clear plastic cover of a fruit cup filled with peaches or mandarin oranges. Add it to your child's lunch for a fun surprise.

■ **Mandarin-Orange Pumpkins:** Peel a Mandarin orange or a Clementine, and place a piece of cucumber or celery in the center to make a pumpkin. If serving the orange unpeeled, draw a jack-o-lantern face on the peel and add to your child's lunch. It's sure to bring a smile when she opens her lunch bag.

■ **Ghost Eggs:** Place eggs in a pot and fill with water two inches above the eggs. Bring to a boil, then turn off heat, cover and let eggs cook 13 minutes. Drain and immerse in ice water for about 10 minutes or until cool. Peel shell, add chocolate chips for eyes and mouth and serve.

Tips for the Big Night

■ **Fill Up First:** Despite the rush and excitement of Halloween night, be sure to serve a healthy dinner, including making half of the plate fruits and vegetables, along with lean protein and whole grains. A full stomach helps decrease the temptation to eat candy while trick-or-treating.

■ **Your Candy Game Plan:** *Before* trick-or-treating, talk with your child about the plan for all the candy loot. Setting expectations about how much candy is reasonable to eat on Halloween night and establishing what you will do with left overs is very important for minimizing battles and provides an opportunity to talk about healthy eating habits and moderation. Some Game Plan examples include:

- ◆ Ask your child to wait to eat candy until she gets home. This strategy minimizes distracted eating, encourages your child to focus on the fun of trick-or-treating and allows you to monitor how much is eaten and a good stopping point.
- ◆ Have your child choose favorite pieces that he will eat gradually over the next week, and remove the remaining candy. Some parents refer to this as a “keep pile” and a “giveaway pile.” Some options for dealing with surplus candy are to freeze it, take it to work, throw it away, trade it in at a local dentist, donate it to the military, save it for a party piñata or a combination of those.
- ◆ Establish a “number of pieces” of candy that will be allowed each day. If you have caregivers other than yourself, it is important to communicate this game plan with them for consistency and a successful plan. My recommendation is not more than two or three pieces per day, depending on the size of the candy. For example, one candy or treat after lunch and one or two after dinner for up to a week. Frequently, the novelty has worn off by then, making it easier to remove any remaining candy.
- ◆ Put the candy stash out of reach and out of sight. This works well for younger children, as they frequently will forget about the candy after a few days.
- **Offer Non-Candy Alternatives:** When the trick-or-treaters ring your doorbell, offer them healthy alternatives. For example, pretzels, popcorn, trail mix, coins, pencils, erasers, temporary tattoos and stickers are popular options that some children will choose over candy when offered. By having both candy and non-candy options available, it allows kids with food allergies, celiac disease and type 1 diabetes to choose a favorite that works for them.
- **Be a Role Model:** Eat Halloween candy in moderation yourself. To help avoid temptation, buy your candy at the last minute, buy small portions and remove left overs. Remind yourself and your child to pay attention to the amount of candy eaten and to stop before feeling full or sick. Halloween is only one day, but the treats can extend into several weeks when unmonitored. If your child eats healthy most of the time, then eating candy on Halloween night won't be a problem. The key is establishing moderation for the days following the fun-filled night. ■

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