

Maintaining a healthy diet during the holidays, without deprivation

October 27 2010, By Perry Drake

We're in the season when sugary, high-calorie treats will be among the highest hurdles to maintaining healthy eating habits and proper weight management through New Year's Day. The first big hurdle: Halloween sweets.

"October is a difficult time for many people looking to watch what they eat because [candy](#) and other high-calorie treats are everywhere," said Brooke Schantz, a dietitian at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Ill. "It's hard to avoid. It's colorfully displayed on shelves in stores, stashed around the house and crammed in candy dishes that always seem magically filled in the workplace."

The American Heart Association reports that Americans consume way too much sugar, about 22 teaspoons a day on average. That can translate into significantly higher risks of cardiovascular disease, [Type II diabetes](#), obesity and other chronic illnesses. Unfortunately, the chief culprits of added sugar are the centerpieces of the typical Halloween celebration -- [soft drinks](#), candy, cakes, cookies and the sugar contained in [alcoholic beverages](#).

"It's OK to indulge your sweet tooth a little during Halloween, provided that you do so in moderation," Schantz said. "Moderation by definition means, 'within reasonable limits and not excessive or extreme.' One piece of bite-size candy a day is moderation and you won't feel like you're completely depriving yourself of Halloween sweets."

Schantz said there are number of things that you can do avoid eating too many sweets and high-calorie foods through the holiday season, including:

At home

- * Wait until the last minute to buy your Halloween treats to reduce your opportunities to gorge on it.
- * Buy only enough candy to hand out. Expect the same number of trick-or-treaters this year as you had the year before and buy accordingly.
- * Only buy sweets you don't like. If you stock up on your favorites thinking you're be able to resist the temptation, you are only fooling yourself.
- * Hand out non-sweet treats. This can include colorful stickers, small novelty toys and other Halloween-themed trinkets.
- * Set limits on how much your kids can eat. Five days is a good limit. Place some candy in five equal bags (one for each day) and dispose of the rest.

At parties

- * Always eat before attending a holiday bash. Eating a nutritious, healthy snack prior to the event will help you to curb your appetite and prevent overindulgence.
- * Take a healthy appetizer or side. If you are worried there will be no healthy appetizers or sides at a party then take your own. You will look thoughtful to the host for bringing something to their party and feel at ease that you at least have a veggie tray there to snack on.

- * Limit your intake of alcohol. Opt instead for light hot chocolate or a cup of hot tea, both of which can help you keep your hands and mouth busy while partying.

In the workplace

- * Put the candy bowl out of sight. Ask co-workers to place candy bowls in a desk drawer, a break room or in a cabinet.

- * Donate the leftovers. Homeless shelters will be more than happy to relieve you of any candy and treats you have leftover and also from the excess your children may have collected treat-or-treating.

- * Bring healthy treats to work. Bring in apple slices with light caramel dip, little bags of homemade, air-popped popcorn or a fruit or veggie tray.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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