

Healthier Easter egg hunt

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Credit: Kiril Kapustin

A few simple tips and maneuvers may help reduce potential negative effects of the traditional holiday hidden eggs search.

Easter Sunday is quickly approaching, and children from all over are anticipating belly-filling festivities staged just about everywhere, from egg hunts in Grandma's backyard to an egg roll on the White House lawn.

According to the National Confectioners Association, Easter is second only to Halloween in holiday confectionery sales, estimating that U.S.-based [candy](#) makers produce 90 million chocolate bunnies and 16

billion jelly beans for the Easter holiday -- and with all that candy comes along some serious calories.

Candy might come in small packages covered in spring pastels, but a glance at the nutritional information reveals the potential danger. A 17-gram Reese's Peanut Butter Egg is 90 calories, a 42-gram package of marshmallow Peeps totals 140 calories, and one-quarter of a 5-ounce Palmer hollow [milk chocolate](#) bunny contains 180 calories.

But those calorie counts don't mean little ones can't still indulge in some typical treats. Before your offspring start nibbling chocolate bunnies into miniature Vincent van Goghs or ingesting Peeps families one sweet member at a time, there are plenty of ways in which health-conscious parents can make their holiday tradition a little more palatable. Doctors, dieticians and exercise gurus agree that little kids -- and some big ones, too -- can indulge their cravings if they follow some basic guidelines.

There are several ways to have (some of) your candy and eat it, too.

Consider limiting the amount of candy you cram into the Easter basket. Instead of filling it with every available store-bought munchie, try tossing in some crayons and coloring books or other festive gifts. Another option is to spread out the treats so that a child will receive a sweet periodically, not multiple pieces all during one sitting.

"My rule for candy-intense holidays is one item of candy per child per day. Otherwise the sugar load is beyond reasonable," said Charles Shubin, director of pediatrics at Mercy FamilyCare in Baltimore.

More Easter eggs make the hunt more fun, so fill hollow plastic eggs with tiny bites of candy.

"I fill them each with one bite-size or mini chocolate or toy ... I mix it

up, but definitely put candy in some of them," said Yvonne Quinones Syto, a Stanhope, N.J. registered dietician and author. "One should never omit the candy altogether for the baskets, but don't make them the only items in there either."

It's also worth keeping in mind that some candies are healthier than others. Mary Sheehan, a registered dietician with Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore -- who advocates enjoying sweets in moderation -- recommends dark chocolate; dark chocolate with protein, such as peanuts (assuming no allergies); and dark chocolate-covered fruit instead of caramels and the like.

Then consider the exercise component. Kids actually can burn off some of those speckled malted milk balls if Easter egg hunt hosts get a little inventive.

Jenny Skoog, a New York City fitness expert and personal trainer, suggests squeezing in some exercise before the hunt, such as a relay race that incorporates sprints, bear crawls, bunny hops, leapfrog, or carrying water in buckets with holes in the bottom.

"Encourage team playing and push kids a little harder than just a 'hunt'. Offer a reward that encourages activity, [like] summer pool [or] park toys in lieu of candy," said Skoog.

Sheehan suggests turning the Easter egg hunt into a scavenger hunt with fitness activities, such as asking participants to complete jumping jacks, sit-ups or push-ups before being allowed to track down another goodie.

"Make the Easter egg hunt a race between sites where the eggs are hidden, perhaps timing the child's running between them," said Shubin.

For kids who want to give a gift to the Easter Bunny, Skoog suggested

that there may be another idea worth considering.

"... Kids can learn how to plant carrots for the bunnies instead of a candy hunt," said Skoog.

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