

Halloween doesn't have to be gorge-fest to be fun

October 29 2011, By LINDSEY TANNER , AP Medical Writer

Offer apples to trick-or-treaters and risk having your house get egged - maybe even by your own kids.

But dentists and dietitians say you can still make Halloween reasonably healthy for little devils and witches without resorting to dracul-onian tactics, like no [candy](#).

"This is such a big adventure for them - let them have it, obviously with some caveats," said Dr. Rhea Haugseth, a dentist in Marietta, Ga., who's president of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

There are tricks for keeping Halloween fun without risking cavities and extra pounds, like handing out [dark chocolate](#) instead of chewy candies or even bribing kids with a toy in exchange for the Halloween loot. Some studies have suggested dark chocolate is good for the heart, and chewy candies stick to the teeth.

Just don't go overboard on restrictions, says Cole Robbins, a Chicago 12-year-old and Halloween veteran.

"Halloween is the one day of the year where we kids just kind of break out and overload on candy," he said.

To help prevent that kind of gorging, try to give children a healthy, filling meal before trick-or-treating, says Bethany Thayer, a spokeswoman for the [American Dietetic Association](#) who works at the

Henry Ford Health System in Detroit.

Procrastinators, take heart. Thayer also recommends waiting until Halloween day before buying candy, so no one is tempted to indulge beforehand.

"I know people who have to go back to the store because they've completely gone through their candy" before Halloween, she said.

Haugseth suggests avoiding cavity-promoting treats like caramels that stick to the teeth, or lollipops that bathe teeth in a long sugary bath.

Also, having kids brush their teeth before trick-or-treating helps reduce plaque and bacteria, which interact with sugar to produce tooth-decaying acid, Haugseth said. Kids should also brush right after eating candy, she said.

Ronni Litz Julien, a Miami [nutritionist](#) whose patients include overweight and obese kids, says another trick for parents is to ask kids not to dip into their loot bags until they bring it all home. That's for safety, so parents can toss any suspicious-looking candy, but it also can prevent an "eating frenzy."

She suggests parents help sort through the loot, have kids select their 10 favorite pieces, and give the rest away. Offer the choice of eating all 10 pieces at once, or over 10 days. That gives them a sense of control, without feeling shortchanged, she said.

"You can't deprive them. It's Halloween, for God's sake," she said.

President Barack Obama joked this week on "The Tonight Show" that he'd warned his health-promoting wife that the White House would get egged if she gave trick-or-treaters fresh fruit and raisins instead of

candy. During festivities on Saturday, the Obamas will hand out White House M&Ms, cookies and dried fruit as they did the past two years.

Dr. Janet Silverstein, a Gainesville, Fla. pediatrician and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' nutrition committee, says she doesn't give out candy, offering fruit or pencils instead; so far her house is unscathed.

When her own children were young, Silverstein would buy their candy for a nickel a piece. She recommends that to her patients' parents, too - though not necessarily her other solution - she used to eat her kids' candy.

In some places, kids willing to give up their candy can make more than a nickel. About 1,500 dentists across the country have agreed this year to participate in a Halloween candy buyback organized by Operation Gratitude. The California-based group periodically sends care packages to U.S. troops overseas. Some dentists pay kids \$1 per pound of Halloween candy; last year, the program brought in 250,000 pounds of candy, said Carolyn Blashek, founder of the Van Nuys, Calif.-based group.

Blashek said troops overseas appreciate it as a token of gratitude, and Halloween candy brings back lots of fond childhood memories. Some have given their candy to Afghan children, she noted. Entering your ZIP code on the group's website, <http://bit.ly/F1iSy> will identify participating dentists.

Parents who plan to encourage giving up candy should be sure not to take it right away, says Brian Wansink, a Cornell University food behavior scientist and author of "Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think."

That's because of a psychology principle called "the endowment effect." It refers to kids feeling a sense of ownership and putting a high value on candy they haul in.

If you let them eat several pieces first, that feeling can fade and they won't even feel hungry anymore. That's the time to offer a trade, Wansink said.

He's tried that trick with his own three daughters, aged 2, 4, and 6, and says "it works like a charm." His girls eagerly give up the rest of their Halloween candy in exchange for a new trinket or other toy that won't rot their teeth, he said.

Young kids aren't really aware of how much they brought home, and when "they sort of count their booty, that's probably the age where [kids](#) shouldn't be trick or treating anymore," he said.

More information:

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry: <http://www.aapd.org>

American Dietetic Association: <http://www.eatright.org> ---

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