

Eat, drink and be scary!

October 31 2011, By Divya Menon

The heart pounds wildly. Breathing hastens. Who is that figure rising from behind the fog? How does that deep droning voice on the other end of the line know what I'm wearing? What lies in the dark abyss around the corner? Scared yet? You should be...it's Halloween and it's time for all your favorite goblins, ghouls and spooky characters to make their annual appearance!

We all know what fear feels like, yet there is something almost perversely euphoric about having the living daylights scared right out of you. Whether by watching a nail-biting horror film or prowling through a haunted house on Halloween, there is something strangely addictive about the escapism of walking into the darkness of the unknown and the adrenaline of mastering one's own deep-seated demons.

But what is it about the tradition of Halloween that holds so much allure for both children and adults? Stuart Vyse, a professor of psychology at Connecticut College believes that Halloween is not so much about tradition, but fun. "Young children getting candy, dressing up in funny costumes, the profit motive and the fun of being safely scared – all of these factors keep the tradition strong."

Perhaps dressing up as a swashbuckling pirate, dashing superhero, fairy or favorite sitcom character can help people transform into their alter ego and give them a chance to act out their fantasies during the course of this single night that we have come to love as Halloween.

Halloween is also an excuse for people to seek thrills and enjoy feeling

scared by indulging in horror movies, visiting haunted houses or sitting through a spooky carriage ride. “It’s a goofy fun holiday,” says psychology professor Elizabeth Phelps of New York University who mentions that fear is something that arouses us. “Halloween gives us the benefits of arousal without the threat so we can enjoy being frightened in a safe context.”

Jim Alcock, professor of psychology at York University says that the modern interest in Halloween does not really have anything to do with the paranormal and that the historical connection of Halloween with All Saints’ eve, when the souls of the dead roamed the streets has all but been forgotten. “Roller coasters also scare us when we are on them yet we line up to get on again. In childhood, the arousal associated with ghost stories told in situations where we know we are safe produce a level of arousal associated with anxiety that has some positive aspects to it,” says Alcock.

So whether you decide to dress up as a cackling witch, hobbit or a ghoul who just wants to have some fun, enjoy your Howl-a-ween on this night of terror and horror!

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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