

Halloween treats can spook kids' teeth

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Dentists offer cavity-prevention tips.

(HealthDay)—Halloween can have frightful effects on children's teeth if parents aren't careful, experts warn.

"Sticky, chewy candies are cavity-causing culprits," Dr. Connie White, a dentist and Academy of General Dentistry spokeswoman, said in an academy news release. "Gummies, taffy, caramel—they all get stuck in the pits and grooves of [teeth](#), where it's nearly impossible for saliva to wash them away. The longer that candy remains stuck in the teeth, the higher the risk of developing [cavities](#)."

In general, children should brush their teeth after having candy. If a toothbrush isn't handy, give [children](#) a glass of water to wash away the sugars.

However, hold off on the brushing for at least 30 minutes if a child has had sour candy, which is likely acidic. Brushing can spread the acid onto more tooth surfaces, increasing its erosive action on tooth enamel, White explained.

Children can enjoy a few pieces of candy on Halloween night, but only after they've had a nutritious meal, advised Dr. Mark Malterud, a dentist and AGD spokesman.

"Chewing during a meal stimulates saliva, which has protective enzymes and minerals to cleanse the teeth and protect against cavities," he said in the news release. "Plus, eating before treating will give kids nice full tummies, tummies that might have a little less room for [candy](#)."

When trick-or-treaters visit your home, give them treats such as sugar-free lollipops, hard candies and chewing gum instead of the sugary versions.

"Sugar-free gum actually can help prevent cavities," Malterud said. "Not only does it dislodge food particles from between the teeth, but it also increases [saliva](#) to help wash away the sugars."

Halloween isn't the only time of year that parents should focus on dental hygiene, White noted.

"No matter what season it is, kids should be brushing their teeth for two minutes twice a day and flossing once a day," White said. "It's especially important to brush before bedtime. Otherwise, sugars will linger on the teeth all night long, increasing their risk of cavities."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers more [Halloween health and safety tips](#).

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