

Five Halloween candies to avoid for the sake of your kids' teeth

October 28 2014, by Stasia Thompson

A big sack of candy is the top priority for most children on Halloween, but with some easy substitutions, adults can offers kids treats that preserve dental health and Halloween fun.

"Every year right after Halloween I get emergency visits from parents with kids who have damaged teeth caused by Halloween [candy](#)," said Martin Hogan, DDS, division director of dentistry, Loyola University Health System. "I hate to see my young patients suffer from painful and avoidable injury and their parents bear the inconvenience and expense of an unplanned dental visit."

Here are Dr. Hogan's list of top Halloween villains at Halloween and recommended substitutes that will make adults the true superheroes of this magical season:

Hard Candy Horrors

"Kids do not suck and savor candy; they chomp and chew," Hogan said. "Fruity hard candies and sour bites with powder or gooey centers can lead to cracked teeth, punctured gums and a tender mouth roof." Instead of hard candy, try snack-size bags of pretzels or peanut butter or cheese-filled crackers, he said. "Pretzels or crackers give kids the satisfying crunch without the sugar and potential tooth breakage," he said.

Say "Boo!" to Bubble Gum

Bubble gum or candy-coated gumballs are what kids like to chew and they bathe the teeth in continuous sugar," Hogan said. Sticky bubble gum can also loosen fillings or other dental apparatus. "Choose a gum made with xylitol to actually improve [dental health](#) as the ingredient discourages dental decay," said Hogan, who is an assistant professor at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. Xylitol is a plant-based natural substance with no chemicals or harmful side effects.

Caramels Cause Calamity

Caramel or caramel-based candy not only coats teeth with a sugary wash, but the chewy, sticky confection wedges in between teeth and stays there, promoting tooth decay. Instead of caramels, Dr. Hogan prefers Halloween-shaped wax items such as oversized lips or mustaches. "Halloween treats are not just candy and food," he said. "Wax lips, glow sticks, bouncy balls and washable tattoos offer terrific holiday appeal with no harmful health side effects."

Ghastly Gummies

Gummy bears, worms and other fun shapes may be cute, but they also stick in teeth and can cause decay. Hogan suggested individual-size, character-shaped cheese or graham crackers. "The fun childish appeal is there and the little crackers are often available in Halloween colors and shapes," he said.

Troublesome Taffy

Whether it's banana, grape or cherry, taffy is no laughing matter when it sticks in the [teeth](#) and causes cavities.

"Small packages of pumpkin or sunflower seeds or peanuts taste good,

last awhile and do not promote [dental decay](#)," Hogan said. "Plus nuts and seeds are a good source of protein."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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