

May the Halloween Monster Take Your Candy

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In that Halloween can exacerbate the cold and flu season with its heightened eating of sweets, I like to collect stories from clients and friends as to how they handle the onslaught of candy. I thought I would share a couple of tales with you.

Here is a favorite. One local family developed the legend of the Halloween Monster. They would declare to their children that the Halloween Monster arrived after bedtime on Halloween night to whisk away their trick-or-treat candy. When young and of the age to totally believe anything Mom and Dad told them, that story flew well. Once the kids were old enough to question the reality of such a creature, the story took on a new version where just like a visit from the Tooth Fairy; the monster would come and leave a desired item in exchange.

The second story comes from a friend and nutrition colleague in California. She has been talking to her three kids all along the way. Every Halloween she has them round up the trick-or-treat stash and takes them to the local health food store to trade it all in for healthier choices. Every year it is another opportunity to educate them as to why sugar isn't good for their body and how it compromises their immune system. She had a thumbs-up result to share with me this fall. Her youngest, most resistant son came bursting in the door from the first day of school this year to let her know about his new teacher. He reported that his teacher had been passing out Starbursts to the students. "Want to know what I did Mom?" he asked. "I told her "No thank you!" "Mom, then when the kids in class unwrapped them, they didn't even look edible!" My friend was tickled that the talking had finally paid off.

With the intensity of concern as to the early start to the flu season, this might be the year you want change some of your family's patterns around the Halloween sugar load. Here, once again, are some alternatives to consider:

Plan a Halloween party so that your kids won't miss trick-or-treating. Center it around Halloween-themed activities like decorating pumpkins, having a costume contest, telling scary stories or putting on a haunted house.

If trick-or-treating:

- Be sure that your children eat a good sized snack or meal before going trick-or-treating. If they aren't hungry, they will be less likely to gorge themselves on candy while out and/or when they get home.
- Let them feast on Halloween night, but offer 'trading in' their candy for something they have been wanting.
- Put all of the extra treats into a high cabinet. Out of sight is out of mind, and you can control how many treats your kids get to eat over the next few days.

Consider giving safer, more nutritious treats:

- Mini-packages of raisins, dried cranberries (watch for added hydrogenated fats and sugar), juice-sweetened lollipops, trail mix, chips, sunflower seeds
- Certified organic versions of lollipops and gummy bears made with Fair Trade sugar that isn't genetically modified, that are dyed with beet and carrot juice, not synthetics and with ingredient lists that are largely understandable.

Choose fun, non-edible alternatives to share with trick-or-treaters. Hand out age-appropriate, creativity-generating doodads that can easily be purchased at dollar or party stores. Items such as:

- Halloween-themed crayons, pens, chalk, pencils, colorful stickers, stamps, temporary tattoos, monster-shaped erasers, glow-in-the-dark insects, spooky fingers, rubber worms, spiders or other creepy figures
- Non-Halloween-themed party favors such as hair clips, hair bands, scrunchies, plastic bracelets and rings, little Frisbees, engine whistles, kazoos, tiny colorful notebooks, plastic watches, puzzles, water pistols, key chains or balls.

Just in case you need research to back you up, Yale did do a study where they found that 50% of the 284 trick-or-treaters aged 3 to 14 preferred toys.

Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF. It still exists! Halloween could be turned into a day of giving, helping kids in other parts of the world get the things they need to survive and grow. Go to <http://youth.unicefusa.org>.

Of course... feel free to use the legend of the Halloween Monster.

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