

Spooky Scary Sugar

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KEWANEE - Halloween is here. This year, many Americans are especially looking forward to venturing out for Halloween festivities and trick-or-treating with kids, especially since the traditional holiday celebrations were discouraged in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, the [vaccine](#) is allowing people to celebrate the holiday safely once again. However, one aspect of Halloween that experts have warned about for years is the overconsumption of candy and other high-sugar sweets.

According to the American Heart Association, kids ages two to 18 should have less than 25 grams (or about six teaspoons) of added sugar daily. Eating too much added sugar at an early age is linked to high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and increased risk for heart disease. Sara Umphfleet, RD, LDN, is a registered dietitian at OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center in Kewanee, Illinois. She says some of our favorite treats are often harboring more sugar than we might expect.

“There is a sugar model I like to use. It talks about things like the amount of sugar in half a cup of Jell-O, for example – and there is a lot of sugar in Jell-O (about 16 grams). Same with the amount of sugar that is in something like just one Pop-Tart (about 14 grams), and you get two in a bag. A big one is soda which has a lot of extra added sugar in it (about 39 grams). And these aren’t natural sugars like from apples and oranges and bananas. These are sugars that are added. Hershey’s candy bars are another example with a lot of sugar (about 24 grams),” explains Umphfleet.

However, according to *Fortune*, the average child consumes about three cups of sugar on Halloween alone, which is about 144 teaspoons and nearly 27 times the recommended daily amount. Furthermore, every year Americans purchase nearly 600 million pounds of candy for Halloween festivities and trick-or-treaters.

If you haven’t bought Halloween candy yet this year, Umphfleet recommends an alternative route.

“I typically recommend offering things like bubbles or bouncy balls – some of those little trinkets you can find at the dollar store instead of giving candy out. You also think of food allergies and they are going to get candy from a lot of neighbors and friends – so try to do something different,” says Umphfleet.

You do not need to completely forego the Halloween candy. But if you do let your kids indulge, Umphfleet recommends doing so in moderation, as too much sugar on even just one day can result in increased exhaustion and headaches – or a “sugar crash.”

“I recommend to give them a couple pieces of candy and then putting the rest away. They definitely don’t need to be eating all of the candy the night of Halloween. And then offer it usually in the afternoons rather than at night time when they are getting ready for bed and less active. You don’t want all of that sugar to sit in their gut,” Umphfleet explains.

It is also important to make sure your child is drinking enough fluids on Halloween in between the festivities and candy consumption – but make sure their beverage of choice is not full of sugar. When it comes to hydration, plain old fashioned water remains the best option.

“It is very important to stay hydrated and get those beverages in, but try to stick to the sugar-free beverages. Choose 100% fruit juice rather than juice that has 10% juice which has a lot of extra added sugar. Also look on food labels to avoid things with high fructose corn syrup, so things like soda,” advises Umphfleet.

While you don't necessarily need to skip sugary treats altogether, Umphfleet emphasizes that you should not let your kids deter too far from their normal daily eating habits on Halloween. Enjoy a piece of candy or two, and spend some time over the holiday weekend enjoying other Halloween traditions as well, such as watching a Halloween movie, looking at local decorations, and carving pumpkins.