

Halloween Snacking Tips from the Michigan Oral Health Coalition

LANSING—Halloween doesn't have to be a scary time for your children's teeth and gums, as long as smart choices are made about the treats your kids eat.

“We realize it's unrealistic for parents to keep all of the candy away from children on Halloween,” says Robert Dennison, DMD, MPH, chairman of the Michigan Oral Health Coalition. The good news, according to Dennison, is that “smart dental habits, along with watching when and how much candy is eaten, can reduce the negative impact of candy on oral health.”

The real trick is to try to avoid the worst offenders; especially the sticky, chewy, hard and crunchy treats. “These sticky, soft candies stick to the teeth and give the decay-causing bacteria and plaque more time to work on your teeth,” says Dennison. “Hard candies like jawbreakers and suckers tend to dissolve slowly in the mouth and coat the teeth with sugar over a long period of time.” Hard candies can also chip the teeth and cause choking, so it's best to keep them away from younger children.

“It's important to teach kids to eat in moderation and to make sure they take proper care of their teeth. It's a good idea to drink water or milk after eating Halloween treats. These drinks will help to rinse sugar away from the teeth until there is time for proper brushing and flossing,” according to Dennison.

Another tip for parents is to offer sugar-free gum with the artificial sweeteners sorbitol and xylitol, which have been shown to reduce cavities. The chewing action stimulates the flow of saliva, which helps to clean the teeth.

The Michigan Oral Health Coalition offers the following healthy Halloween tips:

- Serve a balanced meal before the Halloween festivities begin, so that children aren't tempted to fill up on candy before they get home.
- Offer trick-or-treat candy as a substitute for dessert after lunch and dinner, or a few pieces along with a healthy snack.
- Mix in healthy snacks along with Halloween candy, like vegetables, yogurt or milk, which is good for dunking cookies and washing down candy.

- Model healthy habits to your children by practicing restraint when dipping into the candy jar yourself.
- Remember that dessert can be part of a healthy diet. Moderation is the key.
- Make sure your children brush and floss their teeth after enjoying their Halloween treats.

As Dennison says, “A little extra candy on Halloween shouldn’t be a problem. You just don’t want to allow your children to eat too much, too often.”

The Michigan Oral Health Coalition is a statewide partnership of primary care clinicians, oral health clinicians, dental benefit providers, advocacy and provider organizations, state and local government officials and consumers working together to improve oral health in Michigan. For more information about the Michigan Oral Health Coalition log on to www.mohc.com

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