

Family & Consumer Science Opportunities

Have a Happy, Healthy Halloween!

Now that Labor Day has passed, pools are closed and school is off to a start, many children's minds are beginning to wander to a place filled with ghosts, goblins and sugary, gooey treats. Be aware, it is only the beginning of September and, already, one cannot walk down the aisle of any grocery store without passing the spooky costumes and the calorie packed Halloween treats. However, having a healthy Halloween is not a contradiction in terms. It is possible to send your little witches and goblins into the holiday without breaking your dental plan!

Halloween can be a time of stress for most parents. Not only do you have to find a way to purchase, or worse make, the newest, coolest action character custom, but, you also have to worry about the safety and health of your little one. Many parents struggle to find alternatives to sending their children out in the dark to gather gooey treats from strangers. Not only do you have to worry about the safety of your child while they are out, but then, you have to make sure all of their findings are safe. And, now to add to your stress, with all of the news on childhood obesity, you have to figure out ways to keep your child from over indulging without creating a battle zone!

So, as parents, what can we do? One idea is to avoid trick-or-treating all together. As you are reading this, I know your jaw just dropped. You are thinking, this woman has no idea what she is talking about. My child would never forget Halloween. However, that is not what I am suggesting. Instead, how about bringing Halloween to your house by having a party for your children and their friends? By doing this, your child would not be walking out in the dark by traffic, you would not have to inspect their candy for dangerous items, and you would be in charge of just how much sugar they are ingesting! For example, you could serve snacks such as popcorn, peanuts, and not-too-sweet cookies. You could also serve healthy foods in fun ways. For instance, let your children snack on fresh grapes pretending they are eating scary, monster eyeballs! Or, have a creepy pizza making station. Give each child an English muffin half, and allow them to make a goblin face using pepperoni, mushrooms, olives and peppers. Then provide grated cheese so their faces can have hair or even a mustache! Simply heat the pizzas in the microwave or oven and an easy treat is ready in no time!

However, due to the large amount of work a party can be, another alternative would be to change up your own Halloween give-a-ways. For instance, at your house opt to give away non edible treats. For instance, plastic rings, whistles, rubber spiders and worms, stickers and balloons. Children love to find these treasures mixed in with their candy treats. Also, if non-food treats don't suit your fancy, consider offering non-sweet alternatives. I know what you are thinking. You are remembering back to the days when some strange women would give you a box of raisins and you would frantically try to swap with your siblings for a fun size Snicker bar! After all, what child is going to be excited to come home with a beat up banana or a wheat-germ cookie! However, healthy treats can be fun too. Some examples include, small packs of sugar-free gum, 100% juice fruit snacks, and packages of instant hot cocoa mix. Plus, by offering these, not only will the neighborhood children be given sugary snacks, but they will also be able to enjoy some low calorie, low fat, nutritious options as well!

Finally, to avoid arguments when the temptation of candy is staring them in the face, set up some rules with the kids first, before they head out the door to trick-or-treat. For instance, have a healthy meal together before you head out for the evening. If trick-or-treaters have a full belly, they will be less likely to gorge themselves on candy. Second, be a sport and allow a little extra candy on Halloween night. Keep in mind, you cannot judge your child's over all nutrition off of one night. Third, store candy in a place where the children cannot get to it such as up high in the cupboard. Remember, out of site, out of mind! Lastly, try to stick to a "candy schedule" such as two pieces each day for an after school snack or as a desert after dinner. The word Halloween does not have to be synonymous with candy. Yes, during Halloween, treats are part of the fun, but as with everything, moderation is key. Remember this and you and your child are sure to have a happy, healthy Halloween!

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