

WELL

New York Times

By Tara Parker-Pope

October 30, 2007, 3:12 pm

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/>

Health Tricks for Your Halloween Treats



The haunted house may be scary, but the treats you hand out don't have to be. (Jeff Cook/AP Photo)

Halloween has always been a tough holiday for health-conscious parents. Sure, it's only one day a year, but the leftover treats you don't hand out and the candy your kids bring home is likely to hang around the house for weeks.

I asked nutritionists and child health experts what they will be giving to trick-or-treaters this year and how they handle the candy-laden bags that come home at the end of the night.

Here's their advice.

Think small. Handing out full-size candy bars will make you the hero of the block with kids, but not parents. Offer mini-bars and snack-size treats. Tufts nutritionist Christina Economos likes snack-size pretzels, raisins, dried fruit and Chex-mix because they can be used for school snacks and decrease the overall calorie load in the trick-or-treat bag. Others hand out mini-sized kid favorites like peanut butter cups and candy bars, but parse

them out one at a time rather than by the handful. “Does anyone believe that kids really like apples and other ‘healthy’ stuff on Halloween?” asked Tufts nutritionist Susan B. Roberts.

Choose less-indulgent candies. Chocolate covered raisins still count as candy, but they are at least packed with fiber and other healthful nutrients. Peppermint Patties are low in fat.

Try organic chocolate. Several [studies](#) show real chocolate has health benefits, but most commercial candy bars are so highly processed many of the healthy flavonoids are lost. Pediatrician Dr. Alan Greene gives out small organic dark chocolate squares from Trader Joe’s and other sources. An added bonus during cold and flu season — dark chocolate may help treat coughs, according to one [study](#). And if you want to hand out a social studies lesson with your candy, give Fair Trade chocolates, which you can often find at health food stores or on the [Web](#).

Don’t rule out lollipops. New York University nutritionist **Lisa Young** notes that even though they’re still all sugar, candies like lollipops that take longer to eat are a good idea because they help kids eat less overall.

Skip the candy. This doesn’t mean turning off the lights and refusing to answer the door. Instead of candy, hand out stickers, tattoos and other non-candy items. One year I gave mini Play-Doh containers. This year, I’m giving glow-necklaces. Non-candy treats are a lot more expensive, but to me it’s worth the extra cost to help lighten the Halloween calorie load.

Finally, some simple strategies can keep kids from indulging for weeks on leftover Halloween candy. Sift through the Halloween haul with your kids and get rid of candies that aren’t their favorites. Dr. Roberts says that when her daughter was young, she managed to dispose of about half the candy her child collected before they got home. Older kids add their stash to a community bowl for the family. (Dr. Roberts notes that she also made sure some of that disappeared overnight, too.)

“After all this behind-the-scenes discouragement, she still loves Halloween but looks on it primarily as a night when you enjoy being out in the dark with your friends,” said Dr. Roberts. “The candy isn’t a particularly important part of the whole evening.”