

Resist Temptation: Have a Healthy Halloween

"With all the candy you're going to be consuming, the only thing 'creeping up on you' is your weight...and it's scary!!!"

That's a line from one of my best friends and fellow punster, Marquette Falbo, who co-hosts the Blog Talk Radio program, "The Revolution of Health," with me. We're currently emailing back and forth in preparation for our upcoming show, "3 'Tricks' for a **Healthy Halloween**," so for today's blog, I thought I'd give you a taste of the topic before you become distracted by devilish trick-or-treaters peddling Gummy Brains, Bug Pops, and Skulls on a Stick. (Yum!)

1. Keep all hallows' eve... an eve!

The first tip, boys and ghouls, is that you ensure that you and your family only indulge in the Halloween candy on Oct. 31 – no earlier, no later. A few wicked repercussions could occur if you let the sugar stash haunt your house:

- Your teeth will take a hit: Candy's sticky remains will cling to molars, where the sugar will begin mixing with bacteria in your mouth, creating an acid that can start breaking down protective **tooth enamel**.
- Your energy levels will dip: About two hours after your last handful of Candy Corn, your body will have burned through all the glucose it could process and stored any extra as fat, and disposed of fructose or turned it into blood fat. With no sugar available, insulin and blood glucose levels will dip, leaving you **lethargic**. Reaching back into the plastic Jack O'Lantern for more sweets will only cause the cycle to repeat. Grab a piece of fruit and receive a natural (and longer-lasting!) burst of energy instead.

- Your immune system could be compromised for 24 hours.
- You will store more **fat**: When a large amount of sugar is consumed, more **insulin is released**. The insulin converts the sugar into an instant energy source, which explains the “high” you get from Twizzlers or Pumpkin Peeps. After high levels of insulin are released, blood sugar levels begin to decrease rapidly, resulting in the crash you experience shortly after savoring a sugary treat. Insulin is also responsible for stimulating the storage of fat. Therefore, the more sugar you eat, the more insulin your body produces; consequently, it becomes more likely that you will gain weight.
- Your **digestive system** will decelerate: Candies that are purely made of sugar (those without nuts or chocolate) contain zero fiber, which is a key player in moving material through your digestive system. So filling up on treats instead of more nutritious, fiber-rich foods may leave you with more than just a tummy ache.
- Your body will be robbed of nutrients: An extended Halloween celebration could deplete your body of important nutrients because your body must use them to digest sugar. This candy crime contributes to the development of **deficiencies in minerals** such as iron, **vitamins** A and C, and calcium, which then leads to a host of health problems, including anemia and a lowered immunity.

2. Have your treats and eat them, too!

There's no need to stand by and nibble on celery sticks while your friends and family savor the flavors of Halloween. Here are a few of my and Marquette's favorite festive treats that won't send you on a guilt trip...or into a sugar coma:

1.) *York Peppermint Patty*: 1 full-size bar contains 165

calories, 3 grams of fat, 27 grams sugar This light, refreshing treat is also lower in calories and fat than heavier chocolate treats. Added bonus? It leaves you with minty-fresh breath!

2.) *Fun-Size Peanut M&Ms*: 1 Fun Size Pouch contains 90 calories, 5 grams fat, 9 grams sugar. Peanut M&M's aren't a bad choice when you consider that their peanuts contain protein, which provides a small boost of energy and a satiating effect. The portion-control pouch is an added advantage for weight-watching candy lovers. (Dark chocolate M&Ms are even better for the antioxidant content!)

3.) *Fun-Size 3 Musketeers*: Their fluffy texture makes these bars feel substantial. 3 fun-size bars, which is one serving, contains 190 calories, 6 grams of fat (4 grams saturated fat), and 30 grams of sugar.

And if "fun-size" just ain't gonna cut it, go with the full-size version of 3 Musketeers. It has a creamy 8 grams of fat (4.5 saturated) and 260 calories compared to Milky Way's 10 fat grams (5 saturated) and 270 calories, and Snicker's 14 fat grams (5 saturated) and 280 calories.

Not impressed by the healthier alternatives suggested above? Then go ahead and reach for that Butterfinger or slice of Dracula's Delicious Coffin Cake, but try to abide by the **three-bite rule**: enjoy three bites only, and then put the candy or fork down (somewhere out of sight is preferable). You don't have to deprive yourself of your sweet tooth's favorite foods, but there's no need to saturate it with sugar, either. Pretend you're a guest on a Food Network talk show and sample, don't scarf!

3. Pass it on

When you return home from celebrating or trick-or-treating as your favorite pop icon (fully clad, I hope!) or TV show character, make two piles: one for the candy you and/or the

kiddos want to keep, another for the sweets you can do without. Consider donating the second stack to a local food pantry, senior citizens' home, Ronald McDonald House, or a children's hospital.

You can even profit from your treat trove and simultaneously make a U.S. soldier's day. Thousands of dentists nationwide are buying candy from kids – \$1 per pound – and then shipping it to U.S. troops overseas via Operation Gratitude as part of a **Halloween Candy Buy-Back program**, started by Wisconsin dentist Dr. Chris Kammer.

In addition to the cash, participating dentists will also give goodies to kids, such as restaurant coupons and gum made with Xylitol, a naturally-occurring sweetener that may prevent tooth decay and reduce cavities.

So, along with ridding your house of **temptation**, you can help your kids learn the priceless lesson that it truly is better to give than to receive...or perhaps you can simply remind yourself.

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