

Halloween Hints



Halloween Brings Treats, Tricks and Sticky Dental Dilemmas

(NAPS)—With Halloween just around the corner, Delta Dental of Washington is reminding parents and trick-or-treaters that there are ways to enjoy the holiday while also protecting children's oral health.

While the words healthy and candy don't seem like the most obvious pairing when it comes to dental health, there are ways for trick-or-treaters to enjoy a sugar high and—with moderation—not damage their teeth in the process. And it doesn't have to involve handing out fruit or boxes of raisins to the ghosts and goblins at your door (though dentists wouldn't complain if you did).

"Childhood cavities can be the result of too many sugary foods like candy," said Kyle Dosch, DDS, Delta Dental of Washington's dental director and member dentist. "The bacteria in the mouth feeds on the simple sugars and processed starches in sweet treats, creating an acid which, over time, can destroy tooth enamel."

To help parents and trick-or-treaters make informed choices, Dr. Dosch provides these tips:

Sweet Treats without the Tricks

When consumed in moderation, these types of candy are favored for oral health:

- Dark chocolate has far less sugar than other candies and can be brushed off teeth more easily. Some studies have even found that dark chocolate contains a compound that can help harden tooth enamel and help fight plaque. Not to mention the benefits of the antioxidants it contains.
- For those without a nut allergy, candy with nuts helps break up the stickiness that can cause cavities to develop. The crunch nuts add to chocolate bars and other sweets can also help break up plaque already on teeth.
- Sugar-free gum, such as those sweetened with Xylitol, is a natural sugar that fights off cavities and is a great option for a sweet treat that encourages saliva production while being less harmful to your smile. Saliva helps your mouth naturally wash away the sugar and acid that can weaken enamel.
- Sugar-free lollipops, such as Xylitol-flavored suckers, also encourage saliva production while they're enjoyed and don't harm teeth the same way hard candies do. Just remember to not bite into the hard candy, risking a potential chip.

Scary Smile Candies

While no candy is a true friend to teeth, these can be especially harmful for the health of those chompers if not consumed in moderation:

- Sticky candies such as taffy, caramel or gummies are difficult to remove from teeth and can damage dental work. A thin layer of the candy can coat the



Help your child make the best candy choices this trick-or-treat season.

teeth and resist even the most powerful brushing, giving bacteria more time to enact tooth decay.

- Sour candies can erode the enamel on your teeth, permanently affecting their color and natural resistance to tooth decay. As tasty as sour candies are, they can contribute to tooth sensitivity and are high in sugar and typically, citric acid. To help your saliva neutralize the acids in sour candies when you do choose to indulge, wait 30 minutes before brushing—it will prevent further damage to tooth enamel.

- Hard candies such as lollipops, rock candies and suckers take a long time to dissolve in your mouth and you can run the risk of cracking a tooth. With high sugar content, hard candies provide the bacteria in your mouth with access to highly concentrated sugar levels that can rapidly decay your teeth.

Tips for Trick-or-Treating Triumph

At Delta Dental of Washington, they understand Halloween candy is a time-honored tradition, which is why education around the types of sweets that can be beneficial is so important.

Eating candy with other foods helps wash away sugar and bacteria left behind by candy, especially with some water to help clean their mouth further. You may also want to consider offering a pre-trick-or-treating snack to your kids before they run out the door. Eating a healthy snack or dinner before candy collecting helps avoid late-night candy snacking sessions.

While every kid would like to come home with their haul and immediately eat as much as possible, parents can help their child's oral health by rationing the candy over several weeks. Chocolate candy can even be frozen for up to six to eight months past the expiration date, giving you candy treats all year long.

And, as always, remember to get a good brush and floss in before bedtime this Halloween to help keep the sugar bugs away.

For more information about your oral health, visit Delta Dental of Washington's blog.