



With Halloween Candy, Time is Not On Your Side

When trick-or-treaters demand, “gimme something good to eat,” they’re hoping for candy—and lots of it. It’s certainly part of the holiday’s appeal, but a tradition that causes concern about the effects of sugar on children’s teeth. With a few simple strategies and common sense, however, parents can help protect their kids’ teeth from the onslaught of sugar.

“The quantity of candy kids eat is certainly something to monitor, but just as important is limiting the amount of time sugar comes in contact with teeth,” said Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association.

Candy choice plays a role in this strategy. Hard or chew candies, including suckers, caramels, popcorn balls, and gum, are often the worst offenders since they can bathe teeth in sugar for long periods of time. Some of these candies can also cause additional problems or damage for people wearing braces and other oral appliances. Better choices include small candy bars and other candies that can be consumed more quickly and easily.

Grazing on candy can also increase the exposure teeth have to sugar. Grabbing a piece every now and then from a trick-or-treat bag over the course of a few hours, for example, from

after school until dinnertime, brings teeth in contact with sugar over longer, drawn-out periods of time. Munching on a few small pieces in one sitting followed by a glass of water or a thorough tooth brushing is a better option for limiting this exposure.

Oral health experts long ago identified sugar as one of the major culprits behind tooth decay. If not removed by brushing or some other means, naturally occurring bacteria in the human mouth form a colorless, sticky film called plaque. Cavity-causing organisms within plaque feed on sugar and turn it into acid. This acid attacks tooth enamel and causes tooth decay.

“With each American consuming an average of 26 pounds of candy annually, these strategies can be applied year-round. Let your children enjoy some candy, then go back to eating a healthy diet,” said Dr. Anderson. “Encouraging good oral health habits throughout the year, including brushing at least twice a day, flossing, and visiting your dentist regularly, will promote good oral health habits for a lifetime. That’s the best way to make sure that a little extra fun at Halloween won’t be a setback for your children’s oral health.”