



Help Prevent Cavities at Halloween with these Strategies

Halloween Riddle: What evil villain doesn't go thump in the night or creep about in the fog, but silently leaves a potentially dangerous trail of oral destruction in its wake? The answer is **sugar**.

In fact, no matter how pretty it looks or how good it tastes in its candy "costume," sugar has long been identified by oral health experts as a major culprit behind tooth decay and cavities. 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 microorganisms within plaque feed on sugar and turn it into acid. This acid attacks tooth enamel and causes tooth decay.

"While we tend to focus on Halloween candy at this time of year, sometimes parents don't realize the amount of sugar children consume during the entire year," says Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. "It's not just the sugar in candy that is harmful, but the sugar that is packed into foods such as cereals, processed fruit snacks, birthday cakes, and sweetened beverage, which children may eat and drink every day."

Still, Halloween is a good time of year for parents to review the following strategies that can help them protect their children's teeth, during this holiday and all year.

- Choose candy that can be eaten quickly and easily to limit the amount of time sugar is in contact with the teeth.
- Steer away from sticky candies like sugared fruit snacks, caramels, popcorn balls, and other candies that expose the teeth to sugar for long periods of time.
- Encourage children to eat a small amount of candy in one sitting followed by a glass of water or a thorough tooth brushing.
- Encourage children to eat a good meal prior to trick-or-treating, so there will be less temptation to fill up on candy.
- Avoid buying Halloween candy too far ahead of time to remove the temptation for children (and adults) to dig in.
- Consider purchasing non food treats for those who visit your home, such as coloring books or pens and pencils.
- Encourage brushing at least twice a day with a fluoridated toothpaste, flossing, and getting regular dental checkups to help establish good oral health habits in children and to prevent cavities all year long.

"When you consider that each year Americans consume 142 pounds of sugar and corn sweeteners and gobble up 25 pounds of candy, it further emphasizes the importance of practicing all these cavity prevention strategies year-round and not just at Halloween," says Dr. Anderson.