

Halloween Dental Health Hints

Halloween marks the beginning of the holiday season and for the next two or three months, typically there will be an increase in sweet consumption in our diets particularly among our children.

Children start showing up in my office after school with Halloween treats in their pockets two and sometimes three weeks before the actual day itself. These treats come from school functions, the bus, the playground and after school activities.

Now, just recently some of my parents have informed me of a new trend becoming a tradition at Halloween, it's called BOOING, where kids anonymously leave treats on their friends doorstep or school lockers, the person receiving the treat has to BOO three other friends by leaving treats on their doorsteps or lockers. My understanding is that BOOING starts in early October and goes through Halloween day. The bottom line is, kids will be kids, and it is very hard to control what goes on outside of the home, but there are a few things you can do in the home to reduce this increase in sweet consumption.

Studies show that even a small increase in sweet in a child's diet can disrupt their normal eating habits, this causes children not to eat their normal foods and therefore, not getting their normal dose's of proteins, vitamins, minerals and fibers they would normally get.

Children who have increase sweet consumption are often more active and some parents report they become restless and don't sleep as well. Besides these health problems there is a good possibility of damage

to the teeth. The enamel on the teeth seems to break down in portion to the number of times the teeth are exposed to sweet snacks; particularly those that are sticky and stay in the mouth for long periods of time. Children who are eating sweet snacks throughout the day have more damage to their teeth than children who have a one-time sweet snack. You should make every effort to reduce the number of times your child actually exposes his or her teeth to sweets.

Again, there is not a whole lot you can do for those activities that occur outside the home. However, knowing that those are occurring you can decrease the number of sweets you have available in your home. You might want to substitute the sweet foods you would normally give your child with non-sweet foods, like, instead of cereal in the morning, replace with eggs and toast; or instead of a cookie, a piece of cheese.

So to deal with the big day itself "Halloween", the best advice is not to make the treats, you plan to give out, available to your children days before Halloween itself. Keep treats out of your children's reach, then once the trick-or-treating is over discard any left-over's.

When you do the safety check and look through your children's treats to ensure there is nothing dangerous in them, use this opportunity to separate out hard candies and sticky type candies, like now-and-laters, nougats, caramels, ect. Candies that are less damaging to the teeth are soft chocolates which clear the mouth faster such as M&M's, Hershey's, ect, leave these for your child and give them just one day or two at the most, to consume these sweets. Again it is best to discard what is left over. Most kids have eaten their favorites in the first day or two, the rest should be discarded and not left to tempt them.. Remember, that it is the

number of times your child's exposes their teeth to the sweets that is most damaging. And also when you draw out the Halloween celebration, you are prolonging the disruption of the child's diet and Thanksgiving and Christmas are just around the corner.

It is always a good idea to be more conscientious about your child's oral hygiene during this period and a little more attentive to their brushing and flossing.

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