

Survival Guide for Holiday Candy

As most people know, Halloween is one of the top holidays for consumption of candy and sweets—and these days it has become the unofficial “holiday season kickoff” with more treats in stores, around the home, at school and in the workplace. It is unavoidable and can be overwhelming. But this is also a teachable holiday regarding good eating choices, and a time to reinforce the healthy habits you have been trying to build during the rest of the year.


So, how to cope with all this chocolate around? Take a deep breath and focus on three things: moderation, balance, activity.

Moderation: In moderation, candy will not lead to obesity. In fact, studies presented at the 2009 Experimental Biology conference in New Orleans have shown that children who consumed candy (moderately) have lower body weights than children who eat no candy.

To help kids understand moderation, show them the Nutrition Facts label on each package. Explain what a serving size is and then help them sort the candy into groups of 150 calories to compare the nutritional value of each of their options. Have them make a mental note of how they are feeling, physically, before eating the selected candy. Then check back with them about 30 minutes after they’ve consumed the candy and note if they are more tired, have a stomach ache, or want more. Providing your children with this opportunity to participate in making informed choices will give them skills they will use throughout their lifetime.

Balance: While discussing nutrition, this is a good time to remind children that most of our calories should come from nutrient-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and dairy. Therefore, we should insist children eat a nutritious meal or snack before eating any candy. These good foods will keep your child feeling full and will help decrease his or her desire to completely overload on empty calories.

Activity: In addition to eating sweets in moderation and making a balanced diet part of your child’s overall wellness routine, exercise also plays a critical role in maintaining health and happiness. It also gives your kids a good start in understanding how important it is to include some physical activity in their daily routine. So, put playtime or physical chores like raking or shoveling snow before handing out the treats. After meals, have your kids help clean dishes or sweep the floor before eating dessert.

Keep these practices in mind for yourself as well. In addition to being your children’s role models, the National Confectioners’ Association reports that 40% of parents admit to keeping Halloween candy for themselves. It’s important that we practice what we preach, so adults should also follow the model of moderation-balance-activity. 

TIPS TO HELP MANAGE CANDY CONSUMPTION

- Help your children put Halloween candy and other treats into smaller snack-size bags that can be stored and eaten over a few weeks—not all at once. Unopened candy, properly wrapped and stored at room temperature, can last up to a year.
- Reserve some candy to fill a piñata for an upcoming celebration.
- Set aside candy to make a gingerbread house, wreath, ornament, or other holiday decoration.
- Bring a jar of the candy to a nursing home, homeless shelter, church group or work.
- Save candy (especially dark chocolate) for use when baking.

Better Brownies

A quick recipe for “healthier” brownies that get a boost from left-over candy.

INGREDIENTS

- 2¼ cups whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup butter (or margarine)
- 2¼ cups brown sugar, packed
- ¾ cup fat-free egg product (or 3 eggs)
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 large (or 8–10 small) candy bars, crushed

Heat oven to 350 oF. Grease a 13 x 9-inch baking pan. Combine flour, baking powder and salt; set aside. In an electric mixer, combine butter and brown sugar (at medium speed). Beat in eggs and vanilla until smooth. Stir in flour mixture and 1 cup of candy. Spread in baking pan. Sprinkle remaining candy over top. Bake for 30–35 minutes, or until done. Cool and then cut into bars.

