**KEEP HALLOWEEN TREATS FROM PLAYING TRICKS ON YOUR TEETH**

Little ghosts and ghouls love to dress up and trick-or-treat for Halloween, but all the sweets can play tricks on their teeth. Sugar and leftover food, combined with bacteria in the mouth, produce a weak acid that can cause cavities. While doctors and dentists agree that children should not eat large amounts of sugary treats, candy consumption is almost unavoidable at this time of year. Here are some simple strategies to help keep your child’s mouth healthy this Halloween:

*Eat before you trick-or-treat.* Your child will be less likely to gorge on sweets if they are full.

*Choose sweet treats carefully.* Avoid sticky or chewy candies that stay on your teeth longer, which gives the bacteria in your mouth more time to work. Sour candies are acidic, which can weaken the outer surface of your teeth. Chocolate is a better choice, as it washes off your teeth more easily than other types of candy.

*Limit your child’s intake of Halloween treats.* Sort through their trick-or-treat bag, and let them pick out their favorite sweets. Donate the rest to community organizations that send care packages to troops overseas, or check to see if your dentist has a candy take-back program. Create your own take-back program and let your child trade in Halloween treats for a new book or toy. Another way to monitor your child’s intake of sweets is to create a “candy bank.” Let your child make a daily “withdrawal” and keep track of the remaining balance.

*Eat Halloween candy and other sugary treats at mealtime*. Do not let your child graze on sweets throughout the day. Saliva production increases during meals, which helps control the acids produced by the bacteria in your mouth.

*Drink more water.* Fluoridated water helps prevent tooth decay.

*Brush and floss*. Children should brush their teeth with a toothpaste that contains fluoride twice a day for two minutes each time and floss daily to clean between teeth that touch. Parents should model good oral health behaviors and help their child brush and floss until their child is at least 7 to 8 years old.

*Give trick-or-treaters alternatives to candy*, such as stickers, glow sticks, spider rings, or fun erasers.

It’s no trick – good oral health is necessary for good overall health. When you monitor your child’s Halloween candy intake and promote good oral health habits, you help ensure your child will have a healthy mouth for life.

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