

Healthy Halloween Ideas



Amy Gannon, M.S., RD, LD, Extension Specialist, Family Nutrition Program
Brooke Baker, M.S., RD, LD, Extension Specialist, Family Nutrition Program

Candy is to Halloween as watermelon is to summer. Or is it? With recent trends in childhood obesity and the increase in dental cavities, many parents are searching for alternatives to the traditional Halloween candy bag.



While a small amount of Halloween candy can be a fun treat, excess dietary sugar has been linked to several health issues. The consumption of corn syrup and high fructose corn syrup rose by 277 percent in the three decades between the 1970s and 2000. During the same time period, obesity rates have increased sharply, too.

Even if packaging is small, calories, fat, and sugar can really add up. A treat bag, prepared as described below, provides your child with an entire day's worth of saturated fat and more than a third of calories needed for one day*:

Item	Serving Size	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sugar (g)
Hershey's Kisses®	9 Kisses	230	13	8	21
Reese's Peanut Butter Cups®	2 Cups (1 Package)	210	13	4.5	21
Kit Kat Bar®	4 Wafers	210	11	7	21
Total		640	31	19.5	63

*Based on a moderately active 8-year-old child.

– continued –

To help promote healthier habits and combat childhood obesity, many parents choose to provide alternatives to the traditional Halloween candy. Here are a few examples:

- Air-popped popcorn
- Dried fruit
- Trail mix
- Sunflower seeds
- Pumpkin seeds
- Animal crackers
- Pretzels
- Sugar-free chewing gum
- Temporary tattoos
- Pencils
- Erasers
- Yo-yos
- Spider rings
- Age-appropriate activity books: word-search, crosswords, coloring books, etc.
- Crayons
- Mini books
- Bouncy balls
- Bubbles
- Kazoos

After trick-or-treat, parents can implement a “buy back” program for Halloween candy. To do this, children get to choose several pieces of candy to savor after the holiday. Parents then “buy” the rest of the candy from the child and replace it with an activity such as a movie, a sleep over with friends, or a new book. Children get to enjoy a little candy without over-indulging, and parents can dispose of the candy as they see fit.



The West Virginia Family Nutrition Program (FNP) is a statewide outreach program that focuses on nutrition, food and physical activity through multiple projects, community-based initiatives and key partnerships. FNP prioritizes accountability and documents its impact on related behaviors of West Virginia’s limited resource families. As a visible and critical part of West Virginia University and WVU Extension Service, FNP maintains a strong research base and uses an experiential, facilitative approach to delivering information to the people of West Virginia.

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.

West Virginia University is governed by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the WVU Board of Governors.