

Halloween Is Coming!

WHAT YOU NEED TO Know About Kids & Sugar

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Nutrition experts tell us there is a major “problem” these days with kids and sugar. In fact, the average kid under twelve consumes 49 pounds of sugar per year, according to the USDA Economic Research Service¹. And, indeed that is a lot. Too much, Waaayyyy too much. However, the problem isn’t really just about sugar. Let’s take a look at why we need to pay attention to sugar and how it impacts our kids.

For starters, sugar-sweetened foods eventually edge out healthier fare from a child’s diet. Pennsylvania State University researchers found that the more added sugar children had in their diets, the less likely they were to eat quality protein from animal sources, whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and dairy². In essence, consuming too much sugar leads to a state of malnutrition because kids eat too many calories (from sugary foods) but not enough nutrients (from healthy whole foods). Further, with too much sugar in the diet, children may struggle to accept other flavors, such as the bitter taste of many green veggies. And, therefore, sugar overload may prevent children’s taste buds from maturing. So what we see is that over time, kids won’t develop the ability to appreciate, let alone eat, a variety of foods.

Next, let’s look at a very sweet ingredient found in many foods available to children: High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS). HFCS has been linked in

a variety of research studies to common health conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, tooth decay and more. And, did you know, HFCS is not processed by the body in the same way as sugar? Also, did you know HFCS often contains contaminants like mercury? And, finally, are you aware that most HFCS comes from genetically modified sources of corn? These problems with HFCS are alarming and ought to be the primary focus for eliminating sweet foods containing HFCS from our children’s diets³.

Another big concern with candy and other sweet foods are the multiple chemical colorings and food dyes added to these foods. Synthetic food dyes are the most likely suspects when it comes to triggering behavior problems in children, even if they only eat a small amount⁴. Common symptoms such as: irritability, restlessness, sleep disturbance, aggression and hyperactivity are also reported with children who are sensitive to these ingredients found in sweet foods. Other products that may contain food dyes include: vitamins, artificial juice, cereal, toothpaste, packaged foods like rainbow-colored Goldfish crackers.

Finally, most sugar-sweetened foods are made with Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), like from sugar beets and HFCS (from corn), as mentioned above. In more than 60 countries around the world, including Australia, Japan, and all of the countries in the European Union, there are significant restrictions or outright bans on the production and sale of GMOs. In the U.S., the government has approved GMOs based on studies conducted by the same corporations that created them and profit from their sale. In the U.S., GMOs are in as much as 80% of conventional processed food. A growing

body of evidence connects GMOs with health problems, environmental damage and violation of farmers’ and consumers’ rights⁵.

Limit the damage: if sweets are part of the family culture, these top 10 tips can help keep sugar under control.

1. Feed them first. Be sure your kids have a healthy, balanced, protein-packed meal and full stomachs before consuming cake, cookies, cupcakes, candy, etc.
2. Consider a swap: let kids keep a few pieces of candy and turn the rest in to a candy fairy who will replace the candy with a non-food reward or healthier sweet alternatives (dark chocolate),
3. Movement – get kids moving their bodies! Sing, dance, hula hoop, make crafts, jump, run, play!
4. Toss out the worst offending sugary foods in your household.
5. Set a limit on the number of sugary foods kids can eat per day.
6. Let kids eat treats with their meal so that the healthier foods and nutrients help to counter balance the sugar and chemicals.
7. Keep the sweets out of sight (and out of mind).
8. Throw out a few Halloween candies or junk foods each day and clean up the pantry at the end of each week.
9. Make your own healthy sweet treats.
10. The best way to encourage healthy eating is to eat well yourself.

There’s a way to celebrate Halloween and still have fun. You can find healthier candies at Natural Grocers, and also note there are many non-food Halloween treats, which are great options for families with food allergies.

- Endangered Species Organic Chocolate “Bug Bites”
- Justin’s Mini Milk Chocolate Peanut Butter Cups
- Unreal Candy Coated Milk Chocolates
- Surf Sweets Sour Berry Bears
- YamEarth Organic Candy and Lollipops
- Alter Eco Salted Caramel Treatles
- Organic Fair-Trade Hot Cocoa Packets
- Make a jack-o-lantern face using a Sharpie pen on a fresh tangerine
- Halloween stickers, pencils, erasers
- Miniature toys like Slinkys, bouncy balls, bracelets, Pokémon cards, etc.
- Glow in the dark sticks (this is what we give out to trick or treaters at our house!)

¹<http://www.parents.com/recipes/nutrition/kids/sugar-shock/>
²<http://news.psu.edu/story/212700/2005/01/12/added-sugar-displaces-food-groups-lowering-quality-protein-diet>
³<http://dnpn.com/blog/2011/05/13/5-reasons-high-fructose-corn-syrup-will-kill-you/>
⁴<https://cspire.ca/gaining-health/ingredients-concern/food-dyes>
⁵<http://www.organicatnomy.com/foodie-buzz/81t-reasons-gmos-are-bad-for-you.html>



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