

## Dentists: Some candy better for teeth than others

(Jane Donahue for Sun-Times Media October 30, 2013) – Trick or treat? Costumed kids — and their parents — are probably counting on the treat. When stocking the candy bowl this Halloween, experts agree that some treats are better than others.

“Choose candy that melts and disappears quickly,” said Dr. Katina Spadoni, dental director for Delta Dental of Illinois. “The longer teeth are exposed to sugar, the longer bacteria can feed on it, which could produce cavity-causing acid.”



Items like sugar straws dissolve quickly, as do chocolate candy bars, which limits the time sugar is in contact with teeth. For those looking for alternatives to candy in general, registered dietitian and Chicago-area nutrition expert [Christine Palumbo](#) said there are many options.

“Some fun treats that won’t spook your dentist are small boxes of cereal, cheese-filled pretzel sandwiches, packages of baby carrots and dip, or bags of sunflower seeds, nuts or baked crackers,” said Palumbo, of Naperville. “Nonfood items include colorful pencils and notepads, stickers or removable tattoos, small balls, Halloween rings or bracelets, jump ropes or kazoos.”

When kids do return with treats, Spadoni suggests parents offer candy in small portions at limited times, such as after a meal, as dessert or at regular snack times.

“It’s best to avoid letting kids snack on candy throughout the day,” said Spadoni, “and it’s extremely important kids brush their teeth or at least rinse with water after eating sweets.”

An alternative to eating the candy is to donate a portion of the goodies to a local nursing home, homeless shelter or charity of your choice. At Geneva Family Dental, they donate it for you, and reward kids in the process.

Dr. Melissa Jentz-Cote and Dr. Adam Winckler are offering kids cash for candy — \$1 a pound of unopened candy, up to 5 pounds — at their office in Geneva. All candy will be sent to U.S. troops stationed overseas as part of Operation Gratitude.

“I would like to give back to our community and support our troops overseas by sending treats to satisfy a sweet tooth and toothbrushes to keep them pearly white while keeping the children in surrounding areas healthy,” Jentz-Cote said.

But for Naperville mom Teresa Borneman, dental health isn’t what she worries about when it comes to Halloween. Her sons, Ryan, 9, and Kyle, 13, have multiple life-threatening food allergies, which include milk, eggs, wheat, peanuts and tree nuts.

“We do pass out candy at our house, but because of the allergies, we only pass out what is safe for our family,” their mom said.

Her “safe list” includes Smarties and Dum Dum lollipops, which she said are free of the allergens that are dangerous to the boys and are made in a dedicated facility that does not have those allergens.

“My kids don’t trick-or-treat; we make alternate plans,” Borneman said. “We host a Halloween party with Ryan’s friends because he is a huge Halloween fan. Food is not involved; we do a lot of games and costumes are a big thing, and we like to decorate outside.”

#### **Did you know?**

While no sweets are good for teeth, some are less harmful than others. Delta Dental of Illinois rates the best and worst treats for teeth on a scale of one to five, with one being the better choice.

Sugar-free candy and gum with xylitol — Sugar-free foods don’t contain sugar that can feed on the bacteria in the mouth and produce decay-causing acids. Gum and candy with xylitol may actually protect teeth by reducing the acids produced by bacteria and increasing saliva to rinse away excess sugars and acids.

Powdery candy (such as sugar straws) — Sure, powdery candy is packed with pure sugar. But it dissolves quickly and doesn’t stick to the teeth.

Chocolate (such as candy bars) — Chocolate dissolves quickly in the mouth and can be eaten easily, which decreases the amount of time sugar stays in contact with teeth. And calcium could help protect tooth enamel. However, chocolate with fillings, such as caramel and nuts, is a lot more harmful for teeth than the plain variety.

Hard candy (such as lollipops or mints) — Hard candy is tough on teeth because it tends to be sucked on at a leisurely pace for an extended period of time. Plus, chomping down on hard candy can chip or break teeth.

Chewy candy (such as caramels or gummies) — Chewy, sticky treats are particularly damaging because they are high in sugar, spend a prolonged amount of time stuck to teeth and are more difficult for saliva to break down.