

Healthy Holiday Eating Is For Kids Too!

By Annabelle Martin, M.D.

Q: My kids are excited about Halloween trick or treating, but I'm concerned that they'll eat too many foods that aren't good for them now and during the holidays. What can I do ?

A: As parents, we know how holiday eating can steer us away from our usual eating habits and contribute to weight gain. We may not realize that the two months between Halloween and New Year's Day may be just as difficult for our children.

You and your family can survive the holidays with a little advance planning. Start new healthy traditions before the "eating season" begins at Halloween.

On the morning of each holiday, get the whole family up early for a bike ride or a walk before you go trick or treating or sit down for that holiday meal. Spend less time focused on food and more time enjoying your loved ones.

In fact, it is a good idea to incorporate some physical activity for children every day, but especially during the holidays. Try limiting time spent on the computer or watching television in favor of aerobic activities, like brisk walking, jogging, bicycling, roller blading and swimming. All of these activities can burn up extra calories from holiday eating.

Children, as well as adults, should eat a light snack such as a piece of fruit, a small carton of yogurt or a string cheese before going to holiday parties. It is not a good idea to arrive at a party famished. Not only are you more likely to overeat, but you are also less likely to resist the temptation of eating the higher fat and higher calorie foods.

Parents also can help their children by substituting lower fat and calorie ingredients at home. Try using applesauce in place of oil in your favorite holiday breads; use egg substitutes in place of whole eggs; try plain nonfat yogurt in place of sour cream.

It's important not to let kids eat whatever they want during this festive time of the year. In particular, limit the number of sodas your children drink. Soda has little or no nutritional value and is loaded with caffeine and sweeteners.

With a little advance planning, you can make the holidays a nutritious and healthy time for your entire family.

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BOX – Healthy Halloween Eating Tips

- Serve children a **balanced meal** before the Halloween festivities begin so that children aren't tempted to eat their candy before they get home.
- Discuss with children in advance **how much and how often** they are allowed to eat their Halloween candy.
- Offer trick-or-treat candy as a **substitute for dessert** after lunch and dinner or a few pieces along with a healthy snack.
- **Mix in healthy snacks** along with Halloween candy, like string cheese, vegetables with dip, trail mix, yogurt or a glass of milk.
- **Model healthy habits** to your children by practicing restraint when dipping into the candy jar yourself.