HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

HALLOWEEN DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN HIGH CALORIES

During Halloween children and adults often consume many more calories because of the abundance of tricks, treats and parties. To make sure everyone enjoys the season, yet doesn't regret it the next time they climb on the scale, here are tips for healthy treats and safety.

My children always want to eat everything they are given what can I do?

Make sure those that will be trick or treating have a good, nutritious meal BEFORE they go out trick or treating. This meal should have a balance of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fruits, meats and dairy foods. If they are full at the start of the evening, they are less likely to want to eat all of the empty-calorie foods that they may acquire throughout the evening. Encourage the eating of only one or two pieces of the treats as a dessert or snack. Make sure children do not consume any treats before they have been inspected by a responsible adult for evidence of tampering.

Do you have any suggestions for non-traditional items for treats?

When selecting treats yourself, choose healthy treats, small bags of baked pretzels, air popped-popcorn, juice boxes, fresh fruit, fruit rolls, dried fruit such as raisins or cran-raisins. Or, think about small non-food items like stickers, erasers, pencils, crayons, little glow-in-the-dark figures or toys. One person I know saves her "toys" from children's meals given at fast food restaurants throughout the year and uses those as gifts.

What if I don't want my children visiting homes on Halloween?

Families sometimes prefer to host parties instead of trick or treating. Hosting a neighborhood party is a great way to get to know those that live around you and a great time for you to get to know the parents of your children's friends. It provides a safe alternative for fun. When doing this, you have more control over the foods served. Consider using 100% fruit juice instead of drinks filled with sugar as beverages. Serve "finger foods" that can be made by the children or an adult.

One recipe that is sure to please and still be "spooky" is to place cream cheese on the tip of a baby carrot, then press the cream cheese into sliced almonds, serve with salsa and you have a "finger looking" food. Better yet, use low fat or non-fat cream cheese. Other snacks can include "ants on a hill or frogs on a log" the children can make these during the party or an adult before hand. Since children love to be creative, have a small bowl of peanut butter, raisins, chopped carrots, cream cheese and celery sticks. They will quickly find that cream cheese on a celery stick with a few raisins on top looks like ants on a hill. The chopped carrots on peanut butter and celery look like frogs.

Consider using cookie cutters to shape sandwiches into pumpkins, leaves, witches and ghosts. Adults and children alike will enjoy these fun healthy foods.

What about costume selection?

When selecting a costume, look for the Flame Resistant label on costumes, masks, beards and wigs. Although this doesn't mean that the item will not catch on fire it does indicate that it will resist burning and should extinguish quickly once removed from the source. Avoid costumes made with filmy materials or outfits with big, baggy sleeves.
or billowing skirts around candles or other open flames. Costumes should be light and bright in color.

Those trimmed with reflective tape will glow in the beam of headlights. Costumes should be short enough to prevent trips and falls. Shoes should be comfortable and easy to walk in. Masks should be loose fitting and not obstruct vision or breathing. When possible, use mask cosmetics rather than a mask. Swords, knives and similar costume accessories should be soft and flexible. Bags or sacks for the goodies should be light colored or reflective. Reflective tape can be found in hardware stores, bicycle shops and sporting goods stores. Remember that all in the party should carry flashlights.

Halloween is a time for many children to be out and about, care should be taken to assure they are safe. An adult or an older responsible child should always accompany children. Everyone should walk not run to houses using a sidewalk when available.

Care should be given around parked cars or traveling across yards that might have ornaments, lawn furniture or clothes lines.

Always advise children to not enter a home, unless an adult accompanies them. Children should only visit homes where the residents are known and have outside lights on as a sign of welcome.

This is only the beginning of a season that revolves around eating. Your challenge is to make it safe and healthy. For more information on healthy snacks or tips to assist you during this "tempting" season, call the University of Florida/IFAS Extension Office at 321-697-3000.

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