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News Release

## **Healthy Halloween**

Is there such a thing as a healthy Halloween? How do you promote healthy eating without creeping your kids out on this creepy night? Keep in mind that Halloween is a special occasion, and it's ok to have occasional treats. Just don't let your children become true goblins and gobble all of their candy at once.

Before taking your children trick-or-treating, have them eat a balanced meal or snack so they won't be tempted to dig into their goody bags before they get home. Establish some rules, such as, no candy until everything in the bag has been checked for food safety and there is a limit of two to three pieces tonight. When children return home, check their treats and keep only the ones that are in their original wrappers. Let your children have fun selecting which pieces to sample, but also model healthy eating behavior by talking about the treats. For example, "Oh, this chocolate is so rich; I'd better just eat one piece tonight and save the rest." "I've gotten sick from eating too much Halloween candy before and the stomach ache was no fun." "We can freeze the chocolate candy and use it in place of our regular desserts for awhile." In this way you are stating your food values and developing a plan for a more healthy consumption of the treats. You don't want to end a happy occasion by scolding your children for gobbling down a ton of sugar and you don't want to become the Halloween witch by snatching away the kids' candy.

After Halloween, ration candy out over several days as a substitute for dessert or offer a few pieces along with a healthy snack. The frozen chocolate will last until the next holiday, such as Thanksgiving. Frozen chocolate also takes longer to eat and is out of site so children can't grab them and devour them quickly. You can also have children trade candy for other non-food items or perhaps special trips or outings. Leftover candy can be used to decorate ginger-bread houses at Christmas or to make art projects with young children. Another trick that works with little ones is to tell a story about the "Great Pumpkin" and pour the excess and unwanted candy into a special pumpkin and leave it outside for the Great Pumpkin to take and share with all the poor children that didn't receive any candy on Halloween. Yes, the Great Pumpkin story is a trick, but maybe it's justifiable for an occasion that celebrates "trick or treat."

When preparing your own snacks for parties and festive occasions, these treats lean toward the healthier side of the sugar-coated holiday. Chocolate covered grapes, trail mix with whole grain cereal, nuts and dried fruit, roasted pumpkin seeds, popcorn balls, pumpkin bread, sandwiches cut into Halloween shapes, pretzels, snack size graham crackers, animal crackers or Goldfish crackers, and pumpkin and fruit smoothies and hot apple cider to name a few.

For more information about this or other nutrition related topics please contact Jennifer Dutton at the St. Clair County Extension office by phone at (205) 338-9416 or email [jld0021@aces.edu](mailto:jld0021@aces.edu).

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