

## The sticky topic of Halloween Candy

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The topic of Halloween candy is so sticky for parents that I address it in all of my books. Here's what I said in [Your Child's Weight](#) Chapter 4, Help Without Harming with Food Selection. "Treat candy the same way you do other sweets. Your child needs to learn to manage sweets and to keep sweets in proportion to the other food he eats." I had previously explained that treat-deprived girls in research studies load up on forbidden foods when they weren't even hungry and tend to be fatter, not thinner. Girls who were allowed treats regularly ate moderately if at all and were thinner."<sup>1</sup>

### ***A learning opportunity***

Still quoting from [Your Child's Weight](#):

"Halloween candy presents a learning opportunity. Work toward having your child be able to manage his own stash. For him to learn, you will have to keep your interference to a minimum. When he comes home from trick or treating, let him lay out his booty, gloat over it, sort it and eat as much of it as he wants. Let him do the same the next day. Then have him put it away and relegate it to [meal-](#) and [snack-time](#): a couple of small pieces at meals for dessert and as much as he wants for snack time.

"If he can follow the rules, your child gets to keep control of the stash. Otherwise, you do, on the assumption that as soon as he can manage it, he gets to keep it. Offer milk with the candy, and you have a chance at good nutrition."

### ***Wise use of sugar does not affect behavior***

"Despite what most people think, studies show sugar does not affect children's behavior or cognitive performance.<sup>2</sup> My own observation is that children who are allowed to eat sugar instead of meals and

snacks provided for them by their parents are likely to show deficits in behavior and cognitive performance. [For help finding a balance, see [Using Forbidden Food](#).] That has to do with poor parenting, not poor food selection. The key phrase in my candy advice is [relegate it to meal- and snack-time](#). [Structure is key](#). Maintain the structure of meals and sit-down snacks, with parents retaining their leadership role in choosing the rest of the food that goes on the table. With that kind of structure and foundation, candy won't spoil a child's diet or make him too fat."

### ***Preserve the joy of Halloween***

Ann Merritt, reviewer, experienced parent and pediatric dietitian, makes an observation about this important topic. "This advice should be in every parents' magazine every year. I have seen so many kids have Halloween ruined for them when parents are over-concerned about sugar. When you consider that for many children, Halloween is their very favorite holiday, that is a serious concern."

For more about feeding, see

[www.EllynSatterInstitute.org](http://www.EllynSatterInstitute.org) and click on *How to feed*. For more about family meals, click on *How to eat*.

### **References:**

1. Birch LL, Fisher JO, Davison KK. Learning to overeat: maternal use of restrictive feeding practices promotes girls' eating in the absence of hunger. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2003;78(2):215-220.
2. Wolraich ML, Wilson DB, White JW. The effect of sugar on behavior or cognition in children: A meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 1995;274(20):1617-1621.



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