



Healthy Halloween Treats

Halloween is one of the scariest times of year for teeth. Thanks to trick-or-treating and spooky parties, many children (and adults) indulge in candy more often than usual in October.

Sticky sweets are some of the worst cavity-causing culprits because saliva and ordinary drinking don't easily wash away their residue. Hard candies and other sweets that dissolve slowly in the mouth are also no-nos: the longer sugar is present in mouths; the longer teeth are exposed to acid.

A good compromise is to let kids keep some candy – chocolate is a good bargaining chip –but donate some of the worst offenders, such as gummy and hard candies. Limiting how much candy you eat per day is also a good idea.

To make sure caramel, taffy and other clingy substances don't set up shop in the crevices of otherwise healthy teeth, try to brush after eating sweets. You can also reach for some gum to help stave off decay. It may seem strange to pop even more chewy stuff after a candy bender, but sugar-free gum containing xylitol actually helps prevent cavities by fighting acids from sugary foods and stimulating the flow of saliva.

In this video series, kids will learn how to make some spooky and delicious recipes that are actually good for their smiles. As you watch the videos, you can talk with kids about some ways to add these good-for-you ingredients into other meals. For example, what other recipes can you use an avocado with?

You can also talk with kids about some other fall foods that are great for their smiles. Here is a good roundup of some foods they might see more often in the fall and why they are so great for their mouths:

Pumpkin

There's a reason jack-o-lanterns always have a toothy grin....they're good for your smile! That's because they, along with other winter veggies like squash, can boost blood circulation, immunity and help strengthen your bones.

For more dental health educational resources, go to www.healthysmilelearning.org. Healthy Smile Learning is an outreach effort of Arizona PBS on behalf of the Delta Dental Institute.

Pumpkins contain vitamin A, which helps saliva flow and vitamin C, which helps boost your immune system. A healthy immune system is important for fighting off infections in the mouth. Pumpkins also have magnesium, an essential mineral for building strong teeth and bones.

Pumpkin Seeds

After carving that mouth-healthy pumpkin, you'll be left with a bunch of orange guts and seeds. Perfect for creepy Halloween décor but also great for your mouth. Pumpkin seeds are a great source of nutrients, including iron, zinc, and magnesium. Iron is especially important for your oral health—it helps prevent anemia, which can increase your risk for infection, mouth ulcers and problems with your tongue.

Apples

They say an apple a day keeps the doctor away—but they work just as well for the dentist. Apples are full of vitamin C, which helps fight off bacterial infections. They also contain a lot of fiber, which is good for your digestion and your mouth. That's because crunchy, fibrous fruits and vegetables are harder to break down—both in your mouth and your stomach. Crunching on an apple makes your mouth produce more saliva, which also helps wash away food debris and bacteria from your mouth.

Cranberries

These little berries are small but mighty and help support good oral health. Cranberries contain an enzyme that helps repel bacteria from your teeth which means cavities are less likely to take hold. But a word of caution. Things like sweetened cranberry juices and cranberry sauce contain a lot of sugar, which is bad for teeth and gums. Also, like red wine, the dark color of 100% cranberry juice can stain your teeth—so be sure to brush after drinking it.

Fun Fact: Did you know cranberries contain 90% water but don't actually grow in water? They actually grow on vines in sandy marshes.

Cinnamon

Ah cinnamon, the loveable cousin to pumpkin pie spice. Not only does a pinch of cinnamon give an extra oomph to your morning latte, but research suggests it may help treat toothaches. Some compounds found in cinnamon have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial properties, which fight bacteria and might help prevent toothaches from developing or progressing.

Pro Tip: Add a teaspoon of cinnamon to your morning oatmeal or yogurt for a burst of fall flavor.

Chili

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Nothing says fall like a big pot of chili simmering on the stove. And the star ingredient, the chili pepper, is good for your mouth. Chili peppers are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Specifically, chilis contain vitamin A, which protects your teeth and bones. It also helps reduce inflammation and infection in the tissues of your gums.

Sweet Potatoes

All whole fruits and veggies are good for your total and oral health. But sweet potatoes are especially good for your smile because they're another good source of vitamin C, which promotes healthy gums. Finding ways to modify well-loved dishes can go a long way for your oral health this holiday season. For example, instead of using sugary, canned sweet potatoes or yams, try opting for fresh, peeled and cut sweet potatoes instead.