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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Candy “Buy-Back” Can Take the Fright Out of Halloween-Related Tooth Decay

With Halloween right around the corner, many parents are concerned with making sure their child has the perfect costume to wear while trick-or-treating. However, the effect of all that candy on the teeth of children may be a bigger concern on the most ghoulish day of the year.

While consuming several pieces of candy in celebration of Halloween may not immediately harm one’s teeth, excessive and continuous candy consumption during the rest of the year can certainly have an effect. Too much exposure to sugary candies and snacks can eventually lead to tooth decay, especially in young children’s teeth. Hard candy can sometimes cause chips or breaks in teeth when bitten down upon, and excessively gummy, sticky, or chewy candies can get lodged in the back molars or between orthodontic appliances such as braces.

In an effort to try to curb excessive dental damage from Halloween candy, a local dentist and MDS member has developed an incentive program to encourage children to actually give up some of their surplus sweets.

Fawn E. Rosenberg, DMD, a general dentist at Lexington Smile Studio in Lexington, is among some dentists participating in a candy “buy-back” program for young patients. Children can bring in their excess, unopened Halloween candy, which is then weighed on a scale in the office. In exchange, the children receive a glowing electric toothbrush, and for every one pound of treats, one dollar. Last year, approximately 150 children participated in the program and more than 400 pounds of candy was collected.

The candy from Dr. Rosenberg’s office is then sent overseas via care packages to American troops stationed in Iraq, along with plenty of toothbrushes, toothpaste, mouthwash, and dental floss.

While parents themselves often sneak a few treats around Halloween, it’s children who need to be especially vigilant about all that excess sugar.

“Teeth are more susceptible to decay during the first few years after eruption in the mouth,” says Dr. Rosenberg. “Children are getting teeth until age 13, so they really have a higher vulnerability to decay until they’re around 15.”

While brushing and flossing after any type of candy or sugary snack consumption is also a good idea, especially around Halloween, Dr. Rosenberg notes that it's not always possible or convenient to get to a sink to brush.

"I tell my patients that if they're not able to brush immediately after eating something sweet, to actually eat a small piece of cheese. The cheese will decrease the acidity in the mouth and can help to prevent the breakdown of enamel," she adds.

Letting children enjoy their Halloween candy in moderation won't be harmful, as long as they have good oral health habits. This will ensure that their smile stays healthy well beyond the most "frightening" time of the year.

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The Massachusetts Dental Society is a 5,000-member professional association and statewide constituent of the American Dental Association.