



## Give Me Some Sugar: When Halloween Becomes Hallow-Whoa!

In southern parts of the United States, you often hear adults asking young children for sweet kisses with the phrase, “Give me some sugar.” Every October, the tables are turned as kids go from house to house seeking a different kind of sugar: Halloween candy.

But exactly how much candy does the average trick-or-treater conjure? The folks at My Science Project undertook the critical task of finding out.<sup>1</sup>

First, they theorized that the average Halloween haul is comprised of three types of candy: “premium,” or fun-sized candy bars such as Snickers and Baby Ruth minis; “meh,” including boxed candy like Milk Duds and Dots; and “bottom of the barrel,” such as Smarties, gumballs and Dum Dum lollipops. Next, they mixed candies from all three categories to simulate real-life density and volume.

The results were frightening, to say the least. Those cute 10-quart Halloween buckets – described by researchers as “small-time and below the aspirations of most serious trick-or-treaters” – can hold 375 pieces of candy, or about 9 pounds. The big winner? That old staple, the pillowcase. After allowing for enough free space for the case to be carried with two hands, researchers were able to stuff in 1,690 candies, or 47.75 pounds of Halloween goodness.



### Scaring up sales and sugar rushes

Halloween has become one of the nation’s favorite and fastest-growing holidays. According to the National Retail Federation, 170 million Americans celebrated the holiday last year and spent about \$8 billion on costumes, decorations and candy.<sup>2</sup>

That’s all well and good, but what’s really spooky is the effect of the candy haul on Americans’ sugar intake. According to Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, 60 Halloween treats contain the equivalent of 4,800 calories, 1½ cups of fat and 3 cups of sugar.<sup>3</sup> And it’s not only kids getting sugar rushes from the Halloween bounty. A recent poll revealed that 83 percent of parents dole out their own favorite candies so they can enjoy the leftovers, and a sneaky 20 percent admit to dipping into their children’s stashes and either lying about it or keeping quiet in hopes the kids won’t notice.<sup>4</sup>

### A dentist’s nightmare?

Believe it or not, some dentists say it’s OK to let your kids gorge themselves on Halloween candy. It’s not because they’re hoping for new patients in the form of kids with rotting teeth; it’s because they believe tooth decay is preventable with a combination of common sense and good oral hygiene.

For example, 1-800-Dentist® recommends choosing chocolate over hard candy, which not only lingers in the mouth but can cause cracked teeth. The organization also recommends eating in bulk, saying that eating three or four treats at once is better than nibbling on them over several hours. That’s because nibbling extends the amount of time teeth are exposed to harmful acids.<sup>5</sup>

## Tools for playing it safe, not scary

Of course, the best short-term solution for parents worried about the aftermath of Halloween indulgence is simple: a toothbrush and toothpaste. But parents who want to make sure the path to healthy teeth and gums is fright-free for themselves and their families may find that dental insurance is the answer.

Decay, cavities, gum disease and fillings are real-life hobgoblins. So are the bills that come with them. Regular trips to the dentist are essential to good oral health, but maintaining that health often involves X-rays, sealants and emergency evaluations.

Dental insurance helps pay for those treatments, and that's critical in today's economy as workers try to control their expenses. In addition to helping pay for high-dollar care such as root canals and filling cavities, voluntary dental benefits can be used to reduce out-of-pocket costs that accompany routine cleaning and checkups.

Employers and brokers can help workers protect their oral health by stressing the importance of regular dental visits. The addition of voluntary dental coverage to workers' health insurance plans will help employees schedule and keep appointments: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that Americans' overall reason for avoiding treatment for oral health problems is cost. A full 42 percent of those surveyed by the CDC said they couldn't afford treatment or didn't have insurance.<sup>6</sup>

Voluntary dental insurance is critical to ensuring today's workers and families have access to dental coverage that assures healthy teeth and gums. The sound of a dental drill may frighten some, but the real horror – Halloween and all year round – is poor oral hygiene, which has been linked to gum disease, heart and cardiovascular diseases, pancreatic cancer, rheumatoid arthritis and dementia.

Now, that's really scary.



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### Sources

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