

Treats & Teeth

by Wm. J. Schlotz, D.D.S.



Halloween, as per many holidays, has its relatively innocent vices associated with it. Making quick work of candy on Halloween night is a time-honored event. Seems, at least as best as my memory serves, that, all remains the same on Oct 31st, excepting for the near uniform deployment of "Junior" size bars as the accepted confectionary currency. With historical accuracy and respect, our household, with my relentless coercion, remains nostalgic and passes out the "big" bars. She doesn't say, however, I think my wife feels my motivation is a shameful and silly attempt at encouraging tooth decay.

If that were the case, I'd pass out some embossed toothbrushes and marketing propaganda. No, decay doesn't need one DDS' minuscule contribution to help it along. It's doing quite well on its own, even in today's Fluoride saturated environment. The object, to avoid dental casualties on Halloween and every other day of the year, is to manage oral hygiene smartly, using today's knowledge of the decay process.

Decay isn't produced by sugar directly, but rather by bacteria. Certain foodstuffs left on teeth are eaten by oral microorganisms. These cavity bugs then, rudely, deposit acid on the tooth after their meal. It is this acid (with its low pH) which de-mineralizes the calcified enamel of the tooth... leaving us with tooth decay.

Sugar and simple carbohydrates are the worst offenders and especially bad are the "sticky" ones. So caramel and taffy are worse than a Dark Chocolate bar (no endorsements here, just stating facts). Chips, like Lays & Fritos, try to fly harmlessly under-the-decay-radar. But they too stealthily attack teeth with the best of the better-known cavity villains.

So what's a practical approach to snacking and treats? Discuss the importance of tooth health with your kids and why you are concerned. Educate them *briefly* about the decay process (talk about "the cavity bugs that like sugar just like we all do"). Then offer up a smart three-part solution.

First, tell your kids that the *frequency* of candy consumption is even worse than the quantity eaten during each eating session. So, try to limit the number of eating sessions—obviously, this solution needs to be customized by each family.

Secondly, tell them the *quicker* you remove the food the better—thus, brush *very well* ASAP after eating. Also, an anti-cavity, sugar-free gum could be chewed after brushing for added protection; or in place of brushing if necessary.

Lastly, tell them *during sleep* the saliva is reduced and so, therefore, is its anti-decay (it buffers the acid) action. Therefore, going to bed with candy saturated teeth is the worst possible thing. If eating late, and who doesn't on Halloween, then brush big-time and for a long time right after. Even try to look in the mirror to inspect chewing surfaces. You could assist them. A second brushing session right before bed might also make a lot of sense.

Keep our Kids Smiling... It Looks Good On Them!

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