

Local Moms Weigh in on Healthy Halloween Options, Giving Back

October 25, 2010, by Katy Heider

Moms share non-traditional Halloween traditions rooted in healthy eating and charity.



Halloween is about the costumes, the decoration and perhaps most important to kids, it's about candy. Growing up, I competed with my brother to collect the most loot in the shortest amount of time. He always won and after canvassing our immediate neighborhood, he'd head out, with pillowcase in hand, to hit nearby suburbs with friends. At the time we didn't stop to think about what— or how much— we were consuming. It was just something we did.

Today, more and more families are conscious of healthy lifestyle choices, and are applying this thinking to the Halloween candy craze. While Halloween's allure is built on promises of endless candy supplies, many parents have found inspiring and creative ways to eliminate sugar and overconsumption while also keeping a sense of fun intact.

Making Healthy Eating Fun

Restaurateur and holistic nutrition expert [Karyn Calabrese](#) was a vegan long before it went mainstream. She grew up on the North Shore, currently owns [three restaurants](#) in Chicago and has been featured on Oprah. For her, healthy eating is just one part of a [balanced lifestyle](#).

"Every year I took my kids to Sherwyn's in the Evanston area [for Halloween], which was one of the few health food stores around," she said. "I gave them each \$5, which

back then was a lot of money, and let them buy whatever they wanted. Then we'd go out for trick or treat, bring the candy home and bury it in the back yard.

Looking back, it probably wasn't the best thing for the environment," she continued, "but it was part of our ritual. We wanted to bury it before it buried us."

For Halloween parties Calabrese touts peanut butter cookies, fresh apples with almond butter or cashew butter and other healthy but delicious treats.

"Instead of saying 'you can't do this or that,' I tried to make it fun," she said.

Getting Creative

Kathryn Guylay, founder of [Healthy Kids Ideas Exchange](http://www.healthykidsideas.com) (www.healthykidsideas.com), takes a similar approach. "We let our kids turn in their candy for money to buy something they want, like [Sillybandz](#) or whatever the newest craze is," she said. "Then we find a cause. Last year it was sending the candy to soldiers overseas."

Her site features recipes for healthy Halloween treats, which I tried out. Photos and links to the recipes accompany this column.

Halloween & Food Allergies

Another local mom, Deborah Gross, has found that Halloween can be a challenge if your child has celiac or food allergies.

"My daughter can't have gluten, milk or soy," she said. "So, we've had to hunt around for allergy free candy. Skittles and Mike and Ike's are gluten free. Life Rice Milk Bars are a great substitute for Nestle Crunch. Yummy Earth Candy Drops and lollipops and Theo mint dark chocolate bars are other Halloween staples in our house."

Larissa Petrakis also has children who've experienced food allergies, including peanuts and soy. The Petrakis family encourages Halloween fun but works to limit the junk.

"We don't follow one specific diet plan, but I try to buy organic products whenever possible and teach my children to have a balance of healthy choices, with unhealthy choices being in the minority," she said. "I also try to stick to as many whole non-processed foods as possible."

When Petrakis hosts Halloween parties she gives away stickers, pencils, puzzles and other nonfood items so the kids are not bombarded with candy she explained. Other Halloween traditions include taking bags of candy to the family's orthodontist in Kenilworth.

"I let my kids choose their favorite treats to put aside, and then we take the rest to our orthodontist," she said. "He pays the kids one dollar per pound and sends the candy overseas to the troops."

Editor's Note: Katy's next column will not run next Monday and will return Monday, Nov. 8. If you have ideas, questions or comments in the meantime, please feel free to send her an email.

How does your family celebrate Halloween? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

About this column:

Local mom Katy Heider writes a weekly column on parenting, from interviews with prominent parents to reflections on parenting and fun activities to do with your kids. Katy is a proud parent of an Avoca fourth grader and is no stranger to the parenting juggle. As a single mom, she wears more than a few "hats" everyday. Have a question, comment or story idea for Katy? Leave a comment or send her an email.

[\[mailto:katyheider@comcast.net\]](mailto:katyheider@comcast.net)