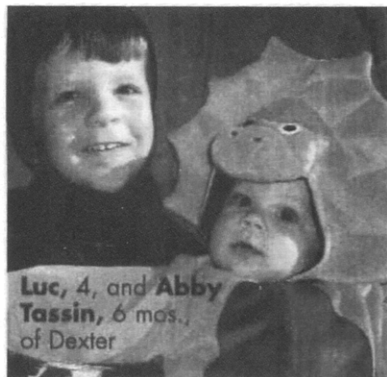


Trick or Treat

doesn't have to mean trick or sweet

by Jessica Schrader



Luc, 4, and Abby
Tassin, 6 mos.,
of Dexter

If you want to give kids something healthy this Halloween – without surrendering your house to the same reputation as those who pass out pennies or toothpaste – consider mixing things up with some popular but health-conscious goodies.

You don't have to hand out apples to give the kids in your neighborhood a healthier choice than Heath bars and Tootsie Pops. Trick or treats can be good to eat if you keep a few nutritional tips in mind.

Judy Stone, certified nutritionist and director of Nutrition Magician in Ann Arbor, said parents should check the nutritional labels on what they want to pass out and beware of sugars and artificial sweeteners.

The most common forms of sugar are corn syrup, sucrose, dextrose and fructose. Even the healthier options may have unrefined cane sugar, she said and artificial sweeteners aren't necessarily a safe alternative.

Stone recommends small packages of nuts for a healthy Halloween handout – as long as the nuts don't have hydrogenated fats in them. Trader Joe's sells sets of indi-

vidually packaged almonds, for example. "I think that's a great alternative," said Stone, who authored "Take Two Apples and Call Me in the Morning."

There are also certain less-commercial granola bars, though they can get a bit pricey if you're expecting lots of trick-or-treaters.

The American Dietetic Association recommends stocking your Halloween handout bowl with healthy snacks like mini rice cereal bites, cereal bars, small boxes of raisins, or packages of trail mix. Mini juice boxes and small bags of baby carrots can also be a big hit.

Susan Bellinson, marketing director at Whole Foods Market on Washtenaw in Ann Arbor, said individually wrapped fresh fruits can make a nice treat. Or try Fruit Leathers, a 100-percent natural fruit snack. "It's a really popular little snack for the lunch boxes as well as for Halloween," she said.

Other natural snacks at the store include chocolate bars by the 365 organic line, individually wrapped cookies by Nana's, or Barbara's Snackimals animal cookies with no hydrogenated oils or trans fat.

As Halloween approaches, the store will also have more individually wrapped all-natural candies in the bulk foods department. And from 3 pm - 6 pm on the big day Oct. 31, Whole Foods will host a Halloween treat event where children of all ages can visit the store and find all-natural and organic treats in the aisles.

"Kids are encouraged to come in costume," she said. "It will be a festive event."

One trick-or-treating trend in recent years has been passing out small, season-

al toys instead of candy. A study published in the Society for Nutrition Education Journal reported that when offered a choice, children are just as likely to choose a Halloween toy as they are to choose candy. The toys used in the study were equal in value to the candy and included stickers, rings, ghostly insects and goblins.

Nutritionist Stone recommends this alternative over food, and she practices it at her own home on Halloween.

"I have been recommending that people get away from food things because most of the food has lots of sugar, lots of processed flour, preservatives and other things that aren't so healthy," she said.

When Stone tried this for the first time a few years ago, she gave out colorful pencils.

"I thought, oh my house is going to get egged or something!" she laughed. "But the kids loved them. They were so excited because they just started school and everyone else was giving them candy."

Even if your treats are among the few non-sweets that find their way into the tots' pillowcases, at least you did your part, Stone said.

"I do feel really good giving the kids something that I know is healthy," she said. "And I was surprised, but the kids really do like something different."

Plus, as many parents become more

health-conscious these

days, said Stone, the healthier snacks may become more prevalent for Halloween goodies.

"I think people are more conscious. Many parents are even doing alternatives to trick or treating," she said. "The less sugar and refined foods your child has the happier the entire family is going to be."

If you're set on giving out candy to your trick-or-treaters, the ADA suggests sugar candies like jellybeans, gummy worms or bubble gum over chocolate treats. If you can't resist handing out chocolate candy, try mini chocolate bars with nuts for a little extra nutritional punch, the group recommends.

Of course, one day on sugar and chocolate overload won't rot your kids' teeth overnight. Halloween is a fun time for kids, and despite your best attempts, it may always be somewhat associated with sweets.

Dr. Chung-Ah Jang, a dentist and professor with the University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry, said kids should be able to enjoy some candy in moderation - and with a few tips in mind.

"If you're eating the candy all day long, that's worse," she said. Have your kids drink water instead of juice after eating candy to help wash some of the sugar off their teeth, and always make sure they brush their teeth after a Halloween candy-eating spree.

"But children aren't going to change their habits all at once," Jang said. "They should be brushing regularly and eating less candy."