

Taking the Food Allergy Fear out of Halloween

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DENVER —

As the holidays approach, many children, especially those with allergies, experience seasonal respiratory flare-ups, but [food allergies](#) are the major source of concern. For parents with a child who has allergies, many [holidays](#) can pose allergy-related concerns, but Halloween can be particularly worrisome.

Trick-or-treating can be an activity built upon weeks of anticipation in kids and apprehension in adults.

However, it doesn't have to be so stressful. Learn how to make it fun and worry-free for everyone involved by avoiding certain costume materials, avoid unlabeled candy, and following other allergy-conscious tips.

Separating 'Tricks' from 'Treats' on Halloween

On Halloween, separating the "tricks" from the "treats" can sometimes be difficult for parents of children with [asthma](#) and [allergies](#), and even for parents of kids who don't have either disease. Face paints, candy and other foods all may pose potential health hazards for kids with allergies and asthma.

Avoid the unknown and have a safe alternative

Kids will want to eat the candy immediately. Tell your child to come home first, so that you can check the ingredients. Perhaps, slip a few safe snacks into trick-or-treat bags to help your child avoid eating food that hasn't been checked by parents.

No label, no eat

Once a child has brought the candy home, closely examine the food for any signs of tampering and the labels for any ingredients that might cause an allergic reaction. Allergies to peanut and/or tree nuts, such as walnuts, almonds and cashews, affect about 3 million Americans, according to American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI). Physically smaller candy labels often don't have room for an ingredients list. If you don't have a label you can read, toss it. Let children with food allergies eat only candy that has a clearly marked ingredient list.

Sizes can make a difference in candy

The smaller-sized candy may have different ingredients or be manufactured on different machines than its full-sized counterparts. It is important to check all labels on all candy.

Use hypoallergenic makeup

Grease or face paints can be problematic for a child whose skin is easily irritated. Hypoallergenic face paints are the best to combat this. Also, make sure that the paints wash off easily. If the child has eczema (chronic red and itchy skin), avoid face and grease paint altogether.



With colored hair spray, make sure you don't spray toward the face, and use the spray in a well-ventilated area. It can be very irritating for the eyes and respiratory tract.

Be prepared: bring the epinephrine

Make sure to carry your child's emergency medication and Anaphylaxis Action Plan with you while trick-or-treating.

Consider pretreatment for asthma

As the night of Halloween approaches and children become excited, those with asthma may begin to show symptoms. Emotions, such as excitement, can actually trigger an asthma attack in some children. Other triggers are cool air and dust that could be kicked up on a windy night. Check with your child's doctor about pre-treating with asthma medication before trick-or-treating if these weather and emotional conditions arise.

Consider limiting candy consumption

Finding a balance between enjoying Halloween treats with the tricks that candy plays on the body can be a challenge. Here are some creative ways to let them eat candy without going overboard:

- Allow children to eat one or two pieces a day for a week (toss the remaining candy).
- Let children eat one piece of candy a day for a month.
- Have your children pick out 10 pieces of candy to keep and eat over the next several weeks, then trade in the rest of the candy for a small toy (\$5 to \$10).
- Let the child eat as much candy as he/she wants on Halloween night only.

This information has been approved by [BJ Lanser, MD](#), (September 2017).

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