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Trick or sweet treat?

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Sir, – “Any apples or nuts” was the catch call we would sing while knocking on a neighbour’s door at Halloween. And that’s exactly what you got. However, if you sang a song or recited a poem you could get a five pence coin. Times have changed. The call for “trick or treat”, imported from the US is the norm and “candy” is the order of the day. Discerning children choose their sweet treats from their neighbours’ rations, avoiding nuts (may be allergic) and fruit.

Our shops are filled with sugary temptations, which are hard to avoid. It’s a difficult time for parents who may want to limit children’s sugar consumption, when typically, a bag full of Halloween sweets can last a week or more in a household. Besides the consequences of sugar highs and lows in a child’s behaviour, there’s the added worry of tooth decay. In general, sugary sweets are harmful to teeth as oral bacteria combine with sugar to create acid which dissolves tooth enamel and causes cavities.

Lollipops and sucking sweets are among the worst offenders as they are intended to be enjoyed for a longer period, and don’t give the healthy saliva in your mouth enough time to do its job properly thus causing a build-up of acid. Chewy sweets are a close second, as sticky pieces can lodge in tooth recesses and linger longer, not to mention getting stuck in braces causing other damage, or indeed, being strong enough to pull out a filling.

To avoid health risks like weight gain and tooth decay, the World Health Organisation recommends adults and children reduce their daily intake of “free” sugars to less than roughly six teaspoons per day. Unfortunately for good oral health there’s no such thing as a healthy sugar. However, chocolate is the best sweet option because it dissipates quickly with saliva and doesn’t linger on teeth for too long.

Halloween is a fun occasion and the Dental Health Foundation Ireland advises families, where possible, to eat sugary snacks around mealtimes, drink water to help wash away the sugar in your mouth, brush twice daily and if possible, avoid sugary snacks between meals. And best of all – try distracting children by playing some fun Halloween games. The memory will last longer than the sweet! – Yours, etc,

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