



# FOOD, HEALTH, AND YOU

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**H**

alloween is not what it used to be—the threat of crime has changed the way we celebrate this holiday. Today parents need to be cautious and carefully examine their children’s “trick or treat” candy to make sure it is completely sealed. Any unwrapped or unsealed items should be thrown out. Because children today are more sedentary than in previous generations, high-calorie Halloween foods may be seen as contributing to the growing problem of obesity

## Healthy Halloween Snacks

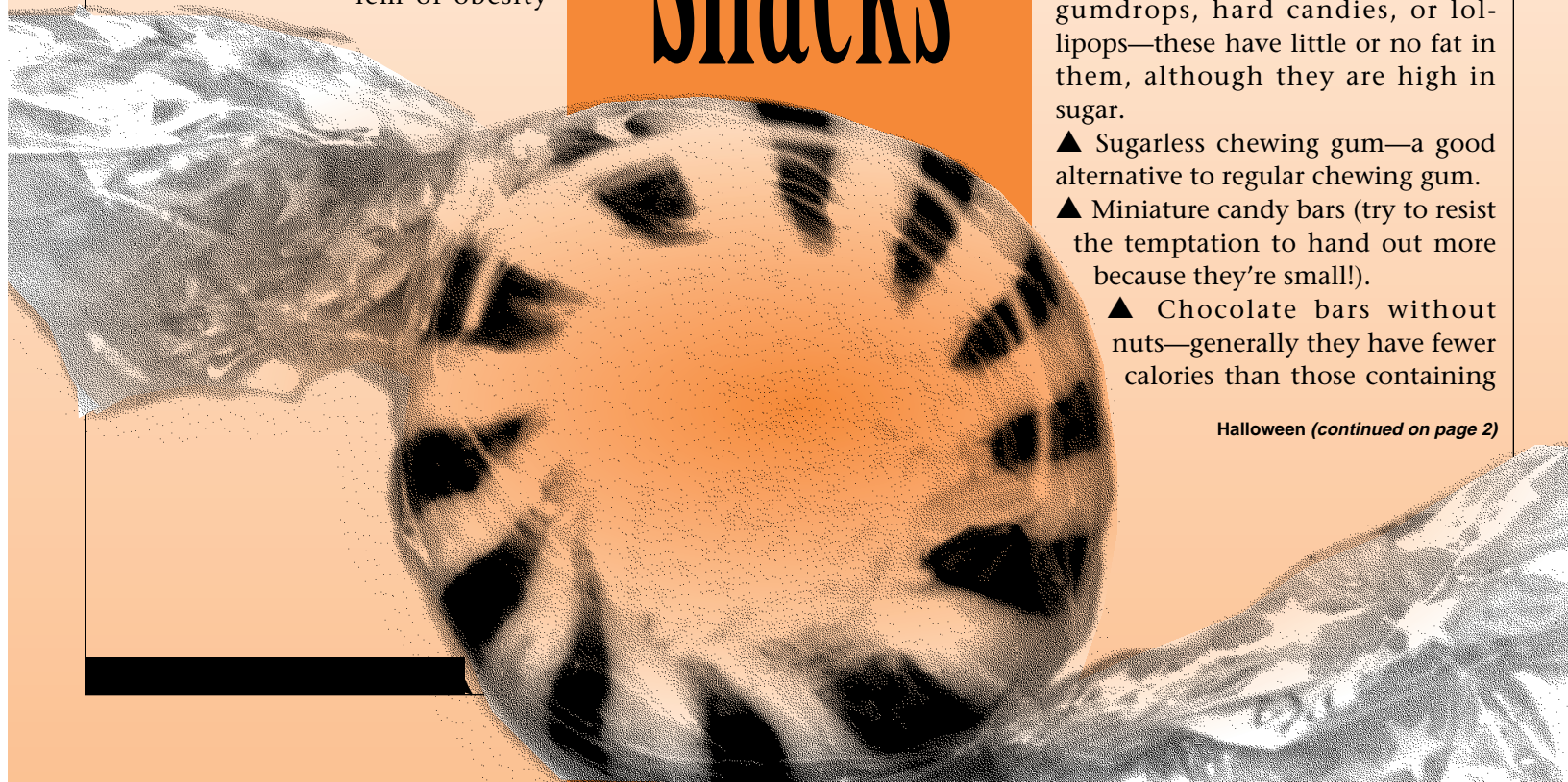
among American youth. But since children still love to dress up and go “trick or treating,” there are several things you can do to create a “healthier” Halloween:

### Store-bought goodies

Although Halloween treats traditionally are high in fat, sugar, or salt, some treats clearly are better than others. When you select candies to give out on Halloween, look for those with the least amount of fat, to cut down on calories. Try the following:

- ▲ Small packages of jelly beans, gumdrops, hard candies, or lollipops—these have little or no fat in them, although they are high in sugar.
- ▲ Sugarless chewing gum—a good alternative to regular chewing gum.
- ▲ Miniature candy bars (try to resist the temptation to hand out more because they’re small!).
- ▲ Chocolate bars without nuts—generally they have fewer calories than those containing

Halloween (continued on page 2)



Halloween (continued from page 1)

nuts. Some companies have developed "lite" versions of chocolate bars, with some of the fat replaced by low-calorie fat substitutes.

▲ Granola bars—compare labels and try to choose the more nutritious brands, as most tend to be high in fat, sugar, and calories.

**Homemade goodies**

The best way to limit foods that are not nutritious is to buy or prepare snacks yourself to give to your children in place of what they collect. Some good choices include:

▲ popcorn and popcorn balls (made without butter);

▲ unsalted pretzels;

▲ dried fruits, such as raisins, apricots, dates, and figs. Small bags of fruit-nut trail mixes contain many nutrients, although they may be high in calories; and

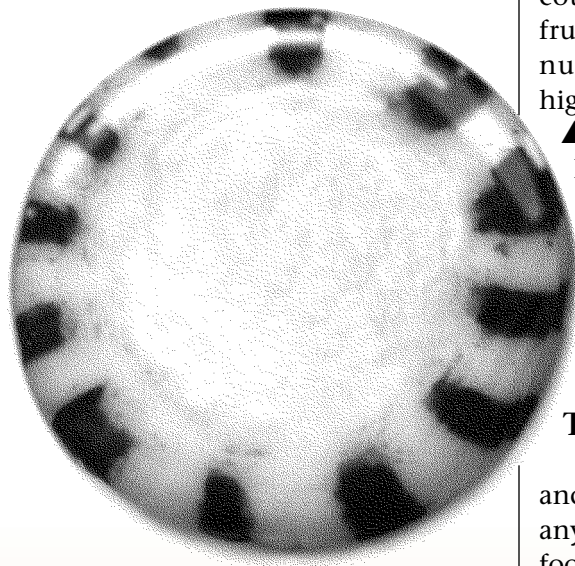
▲ Cookies, such as fig bars, graham crackers, ginger snaps, vanilla wafers, animal crackers, and some oatmeal cookies. These are relatively low in fat or sugar. Many varieties of low-calorie cookies are now available.

**The scoop on sugar**

Besides contributing calories and relatively few nutrients, is there any harm in eating candy and other foods high in sugar? Although there is no scientific evidence that sugary foods can lead to hyperactive behavior or diabetes in children, frequent snacking on foods rich in sugar or any type of carbohydrate can result in tooth decay. Parents should discourage children from snacking too often, and encourage them to regularly brush their teeth, especially after snacking on sticky treats.

Even though Halloween does not promote the best nutrition, indulging in candy on special occasions or in moderation is unlikely to cause much harm to children if their overall diet is healthy throughout the year. Parents can do their part by trying to make healthier treats available on Halloween. As a final reminder, it is wise not to let your kids eat homemade treats unless you know where they came from and you trust the person who made them.

Source: *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*. 1991. 19(10):15-16. ■



**USDA DEVELOPS NO-CALORIE, HIGH-FIBER FAT SUBSTITUTE**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently announced that it has developed a new fat substitute, which the agency claims has a pleasing taste and texture and no unpleasant side effects, such as the cramps and diarrhea that may result from eating olestra. Olestra is another fat substitute that recently was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (see "Food, Health, and You," April 1996).

The new artificial fat, called Z-Trim, is completely fat-free and has zero calories. It is made from various low-cost agricultural byproducts, such as the hulls of oats, soybeans, peas, and rice, or from the bran of corn or wheat. The hulls or bran are processed into microscopic fragments, purified, and then dried into a powder.

When the powder fragments absorb water, they swell and form a gel. Depending on the type of food and the texture that is desired, food manufacturers can use either the powder or the gel in varying amounts to produce low-calorie, reduced-fat products having a smooth "mouth feel" that mimics the taste and texture of real fat.

For example, Z-Trim can replace much of the fat in cheese, ice cream, and chocolate, and can be added to skim milk to make it taste more like whole milk. Z-Trim can withstand the heat of baking, and therefore can replace part of the fat, flour, or sugar in baked goods such as cakes and cookies.

As an added bonus, Z-Trim can actually enhance the nutritional quality of foods because of its fiber content. However, it is not suitable for frying, so it cannot be used to make french fries or potato chips, as olestra can.

The inventor of Z-Trim, Dr. George E. Inglett, says the new ingredient is especially compatible with meat products, such as ham-

burgers, hot dogs, and deli meats. "A 96 percent fat-free hamburger normally will taste like shoe leather, but if Z-Trim is added, the hamburger will be tender," Dr. Inglett said.

At the USDA National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research in Peoria, Illinois, where Dr. Inglett works, food scientist Kathleen Warner made Z-Trim foods for a group of experienced taste testers. The panelists gave equal ratings to regular brownies containing 25 percent fat and brownies made with Z-Trim that contained only 15.5 percent fat. In the low-calorie Z-Trim brownies, about one-half teaspoon of Z-Trim replaced 29 grams of fat and reduced the normal amount of flour by half.

The USDA has applied for a patent on the process for making the new fat replacer. Once the patent has been obtained, the agency will license the process to private companies to develop commercial products. Z-Trim will be sold to food manufacturers but not directly to consumers. Dr. Inglett, who also invented an earlier fat substitute called Oatrim (see "Food, Health, and You," April 1994) has already created a 1-ounce chocolate bar containing half a gram of Z-Trim, oat fiber, corn syrup, milk chocolate, artificial sweetener, and Oatrim.



"Z-Trim is another example of how agriculture research has a direct impact on the lives of consumers," said Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. "We often think that agricultural science doesn't touch our day-to-day existence. But

in fact, these kinds of research results can be seen up and down the aisles of every supermarket across America. Offering a healthful, good-tasting option to high-calorie indulgences will help people keep their weight under control."

Sources: USDA News Release, August 26, 1996; personal communication with Dr. George E. Inglett, September 5, 1996. ■



●The number of supermarkets in the United States decreased from 26,815 in 1980 to 24,548 in 1993. However, the average floor size of the selling area increased from 23,000 to 35,000 square feet.

●For the past several years, a national campaign called "5-a-Day for Better Health" has been encouraging consumers to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, but a recent survey found that only 34 percent of Americans have ever heard of this program.

●A new study found that "hot responders"—people who tend to overreact to everyday stresses such as traffic jams or tight deadlines at work—are at an increased risk for heart disease.

●The organic food industry had record earnings in 1995: \$2.8 billion. This was the second year that profits increased by more than \$2 billion, and the sixth consecutive year that sales of organic foods have enjoyed an increase of more than 20 percent.

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Address comments about this newsletter to Food, Health, and You, Department of Nutrition and Food Science, 3306 Marie Mount Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Kindly direct questions on specific food and nutrition topics to your county Extension office.

If you do not receive this newsletter by mail and would like to, contact your county or Baltimore City Extension office. For information on upcoming programs on food and nutrition, or to arrange a program for your group or organization, contact your Extension home economics agent. Phone numbers of Extension offices are listed on page 4 of this issue.



**Q:** Can diet help relieve the pain of arthritis?

**A:** There is some evidence that the “omega-3 fatty acids” found in fatty fish such as bluefish and mackerel can sometimes lessen the pain and stiffness of rheumatoid arthritis. A vegetarian diet recently was shown to reduce symptoms of this disease in some people. There also is evidence that overweight people can lower their risk for developing osteoarthritis of the knee by losing weight, since excess weight increases pressure on the

knees and hips. However, the Arthritis Foundation says that more research is needed to confirm that certain foods or diets may help ease arthritis symptoms. Since there are more than 100 types of arthritis, even if a dietary treatment is found to relieve symptoms, it is unlikely to help every form of the disease.

## EXTENSION CORNER

•Extension agents from three Eastern Shore counties are offering a program called “Peas, Beans, Oats, and Barley Grow,” to demonstrate how to prepare grain products, especially barley, in tasty and creative ways: Kent Co., Nov. 12; Dorchester Co., Nov. 20; and Wicomico Co., Nov. 14.

All programs will be held from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and include a lunch of soup and bread. A salad, bread, and casserole also will be prepared and shared with the audience. Cost: \$5 if you preregister, or \$7 at the door. For more information, please call the participating county offices.

•The Frederick County Extension Service will present “Gifts from the Kitchen” on Nov. 20 and 21, from 7-8 p.m. Learn how to create healthy, delicious, and festive holiday gifts for your friends and family. Cost: \$3 to cover tasting and hand-outs. Please call the Frederick County Extension office to register. Specify the date you would like to attend.

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