

Please note that *The Livingston Daily* reprinted the USA Today Halloween article below:

# Dentist: Candy exposure length increases tooth decay risk

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"The length of exposure is what increases decay risk," Rhea Haugseth, president of the American Academy of [Pediatric Dentistry](#).

You might think dentists would have strong feelings about Halloween. However, most don't jump out of their skins over it. "We just want kids to be kids, and part of a kid's life is treats," says Rhea Haugseth, president of the American Academy of [Pediatric](#) Dentistry.

Dentists agree that the greatest danger candy poses for teeth is when patients "graze" on it all day. That's why **Meg Lochary**, a [pediatric dentist](#) in Matthews, N.C., says the best option is to allow children to eat their candy in one sitting, then get rid of the leftovers.

"The length of exposure is what increases decay risk," says Haugseth. Taffy, caramel and nougat stick to teeth longer than plain chocolates.

The worst options, she says, are suckers, which stay in the mouth longer and increase acid production, and hard candies that can break sealant and chip teeth. What's more, she notices a surge in [orthodontic](#) patients the week after Halloween, when candy has broken brackets and left wires out of whack.

Dentists caution that seemingly healthier options like crackers and pretzels also can get stuck in the crevices of teeth, promoting decay. Raisins and dried fruit, or

cookies and kettle corn, may be a bit more nutritious than candy, says Lochary, but they can also be packed with sugar and stick in the grooves of the teeth.

And yes, some [dentists](#) admit to handing out toothbrushes to trick-or-treaters.

"The kids think I'm a nerd, but after a full night of collecting candy, they may think it's cool to get something different," says Joel Berg, chair of the department of pediatric dentistry at the University of Washington.

Haugseth adds that many dentists also give out Halloween-themed pencils, stickers and tattoos.

Some try more dramatic approaches with their own children. **Diane Stacey**, a dentist in Henderson, Nev., gives her kids up to three days to eat nothing but candy for every meal, then donates it.

"It works like a charm," she says. "By the second day they are so tired of candy, they start asking me for macaroni and cheese or sandwiches."