

## Braces and sticky candy: A Halloween nightmare

By MEGAN K. SCOTT | Associated Press Writer | Posted: Saturday, October 24, 2009 12:00 pm

NEW YORK -- For the past two Halloweens, Julie Bonn Heath has gotten into a few battles with her son. It wasn't that he was eating too much candy -- he was just eating the wrong kind.

Her son, Nick, now 14, wore braces for two years, which meant his favorite treats like sticky, gummy candy and candied apples were off limits.

"We would catch him chewing gum," said Heath, 39, of Seaside, Ore. Her son got his braces off four months ago, but even with retainers, he has to be careful. "All I could say was, 'Stop.' That seemed to work for the most part."



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(AP Photo/RUBRA,File)

So did reminding him of the \$6,000 invested in his smile, she said.

More than 4 million children and teens in the U.S. and Canada are under the care of an orthodontist, according to the American Association of Orthodontists. Many of them will go trick-or-treating or partying this Halloween, where they will be enticed with treats that are bad for braces.

While too much sugar isn't good for anyone, chewy candy, hard pretzels and bubblegum can damage braces and prolong treatment, said Dr. Robert Bray, president of the AAO.

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Sharon Mostyn, 41, of Baltimore, found that out when her 14-year-old daughter was chewing a gummy bear after she first got her braces and damaged them. After trick-or-treating, Mostyn went through her daughter's bag and removed any problem candy, which she took to work.

### Finding some alternatives

Orthodontists and dentists suggest parents find alternatives to off-limit treats, such as soft chocolate or candy that dissolves, so kids don't feel so deprived. Bray recommends they sort through the Halloween bag and remove the damaging treats.

Lynn Belz, 45, a mother of four in Marmora, N.J., said she cuts up an apple and serves it with caramel dip for her 15-year-old who is in braces. Her oldest had braces already and her two youngest will need them.

Bukholts said she prefers soft chocolate, marshmallows, and "sucking candy" as long as there is no Tootsie Roll in the middle if a braces-wearing kid insists on eating candy. (Bray said candies like Tootsie Rolls and Laffy Taffy can damage braces). Starburst and Skittles aren't so bad either, said Bukholts. But gum balls and candy corn are no-nos.

Regardless of whether a kid is in braces, parents need to monitor their sugar intake, said Dr. Mary Hayes, a pediatric dentist in Chicago. Simple sugars promote the growth of plaque, she said. If someone eats a lot of candy, the plaque "explodes on the teeth," she said.

She recommends kids drink water and milk to neutralize the acid that candy causes. Some orthodontists allow sugarless gum, which promotes saliva and can be beneficial as well.

Hayes, who advises brushing, flossing and rinsing with a fluoride mouthwash, said it's better to eat candy in one sitting and then brush than eat it throughout the day and have the sugar stay on the teeth.

Some parents have come up with their own strategies for limiting the sugar intake.

Mandi Corbett, 41, a mother of three in Brigantine, N.J., has her children, one who is in braces, limit their Halloween candy to 30 pieces. They can eat all 30 in one day, or one on each day for the next month. She also does not keep candy around the house.

"That's why on Halloween there is so much excitement and so much fun," she said.

Belz said she really tries to work with her kids to make sure there are other treats that are attractive and available to them, like a soft chocolate bar over Laffy Taffy.

"If you spend a little bit of time in the grocery store and paying attention to what your kids like and how you can adapt it what their limitations are, it's really not that big of a deal," she said.

"As long as they know you are working with them, they are willing to work with you."