

Make Halloween safer, healthier for kids

By **Melissa Davis**

Halloween is one week from today. Whether you choose to have a big celebration at home, participate in a school function or take your little goblins trick or treating, there are simple ways to make Halloween safer and healthier.

For starters, consider serving healthy snacks that have traditional Halloween colors. Try cantaloupe melon, pumpernickel bread, cheddar cheese, mozzarella sticks, whole grain crackers, carrots, sweet peppers, tomatoes and peaches.

Turn your snacks into fun shapes by using Halloween themed cookie cutters to cut up cheese, bread, and melon. Use a marker or stickers to dress up clementines and oranges as cute jack-o'-lanterns.

Get into the Halloween spirit by trying roasted pumpkin and butternut squash. This is also a great dish to serve at a Halloween celebration. Here is an easy recipe.

Roasted Squash

- Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees.
- Wash squash, remove skin and cut into chunks.
- Toss squash chunks with oil, salt, and pepper.
- Place on baking sheet and roast at 400 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes (until tender).
- Optional: Drizzle maple syrup over roasted squash.

Need to do something with all those seeds from the jack-o'-lantern? Try roasting pumpkin seeds. You may use other squash seeds, too. Here are the directions.

Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

- Pre-heat oven to 325 degrees.
- Put seeds in colander or strainer and rinse well, pat dry with towel.
- Toss seeds with oil and salt.
- Bake at 325 degrees for 15 to 30 minutes, until seeds are dry and golden brown.
- Cool for 10 minutes. Enjoy right away or store in container for up to one week.

If you choose to participate in trick or treating, skip the candy. Instead, hand out non-food prizes such as pencils, stickers, crayons, small toys, glow sticks, bubbles and mini books or notebooks.

Before your superheroes and villains head out the door, check costumes for potential hazards, such as tripping. Putting reflective tape on children's costumes will increase their visibility. The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that children wear makeup and hats rather than costume

masks that can obscure their vision. It's best to test the makeup you plan to use in advance to make sure the child isn't allergic.

Children who are going trick or treating should only go to homes of people they know and never go alone. It's best for a responsible adult to accompany trick or treaters. Flashlights and glow sticks should be used to see and be seen. Children are twice as likely to be hit by a motor vehicle on Halloween, compared to any other night of the year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Treat bags need to be inspected before kids eat anything. Look for hazards such as small toys that may be choking hazards for very young children. Inspect candy for signs of tampering and ingredients that may be allergens for your child. Throw away anything that looks suspicious.

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