

Opportunity Knocks

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Healthy Celebrations for Healthy Teeth

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Special occasion celebrations like birthdays, holidays and new classmates are

an important part of a child’s social development. When food is part of a celebration, parents and caregivers can support healthy habits by ensuring that the snacks and treats are healthy options for young bodies. Best of all, you don’t have to eliminate the fun factor! Here are some tips to consider when choosing treats and snacks for children:

Treats/Handouts to Avoid...	Why?
Licorice, sticky/chewy sweets, fruit chew snacks	High sugar content; Sticky foods stay on teeth longer, and cavity-causing germs cause an “acid attack” that weakens teeth and leads to decay
Candy with crunchy or hard coating	High sugar content; Small particles stick in crevices of teeth, especially in molars that children have difficulty reaching with their toothbrush
Hard candy, citrus-flavored candies, suckers	Choking hazard for young children; candy and suckers coat teeth in sugar over a longer time.
Tiny graham crackers, granola bars	Moderate sugar content; Small particles stick in crevices of teeth

Offer no-calorie treats and create celebrations that are about fun and sharing, such as:

- stickers
- pencils
- pencil toppers or erasers
- mini-bottles of bubbles (found at party supply stores)
- spider rings
- bouncy balls

- sugar-free gum
- mini containers of play dough

If you must provide a sweet treat, remember: smaller is better. Consider bite size chocolates that melt away and leave the mouth quickly, like Kisses, Peanut Butter Cups or a Peppermint Patty.

Snacks/Celebration foods to Avoid...	Why?
Cupcakes, cookies, baked goods	High sugar content, low nutritional value
Pop, fruit-flavored punch	High sugar and acid content, creates an “acid attack” in the mouth that leads to tooth decay
Chips, crackers, granola bars	Small particles stick in crevices of teeth

In addition to being low in calories and high in nutrients, these foods also support the development of strong teeth:

- raw vegetables (carrot or celery sticks, cherry tomatoes)
- fresh fruit with low fat yogurt dip
- string cheese or cheese cubes
- low fat turkey or ham cubes
- low fat milk (add a few drops of food color to tint, if desired)
- whole grain muffins

For more ideas on healthy celebrations, check out these resources:

- Tasty Treats for Teeth Brochure
<http://www.oralhealthkansas.org/pdf/FF%20snacks-2011.pdf>
- Tasty Treats for Teeth Cookbook
<http://www.oralhealthkansas.org/pdf/TASTY%20TREATS%20FOR%20TEETH%20COOKBOOK.pdf>
- Healthy Food for Healthy Celebrations
<http://www.oeonline.org/resources/publications/factsheetarchive/healthy-food-for-healthy-celebrations>

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