

# Life, Work & Family

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## Pets: An Ounce of Prevention Keeps the Germs Away

Owning a pet can be a rewarding experience for children and adults. And you can make sure it's a healthy experience by following a few simple tips. It all starts with keeping your pet healthy and being a responsible pet owner.



### How can you keep your pet healthy?

- Adopt your pet from an animal shelter or purchase it from a reputable pet store or breeder.
- Have your new companion checked out right away by a veterinarian.
- Keep your pet under a veterinarian's care for regularly scheduled shots and treatment for worms. This reduces the chance that your pet could get sick and pass an infection to you or your family. Since the cost of veterinary care may not be within everyone's reach, the local animal shelter or humane society may have information about low-cost clinics.
- Give your pet a balanced diet and do not allow it to eat raw food or drink out of the toilet.
- Clean your pet's living area at least once a week. Bury the feces, or place them in a plastic bag and then put it in the trash.
- Litter boxes should be cleaned daily and the dirty litter placed in a plastic bag. To prevent infectious diseases that may cause birth defects, pregnant women should not change cat litter boxes. A child's sandbox can become a cat's litter box so cover it when not in use. Areas that have been contaminated with dog or cat feces should be off limits to children -- not only at home but also in public areas such as parks or playgrounds. And because toddlers naturally explore their environment, teach children not to eat dirt
- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling or cleaning up after animals, especially reptiles. Teach your children to do the same. This is also important after contacting dirt because hookworms from animal feces in the soil can enter through your skin.

### What about having a wild animal as a pet?

In general, wild animals do not make good pets because they are not tame and do not adapt well to living in a house. But if you must have one make sure you know about any special needs the animal has or diseases it can transmit before buying it from a pet store.

### What's the most serious disease that animals can transmit to people?

The most serious disease that animals can transmit to people is rabies. But, because responsible pet owners are keeping their animals immunized each year, the number of rabies cases in the United States has been drastically reduced. However, rabies is still found in wild animals. Cats, as well as dogs, should be immunized against rabies.

### **Why should you have your pet immunized against rabies?**

Having your pet immunized protects it against rabies if it's attacked by a rabid animal. But if your pet is not immunized, it could get rabies and then give it to you or your family. So obey local leash laws and control your pets so that they do not come into contact with, or prey on, wild animals.

### **What should you do if you are bitten or scratched by an animal?**

Each year almost 800,000 persons bitten by dogs or cats require medical attention. So, never approach an unfamiliar animal. If you do get bitten or scratched always

- Wash the area with soap and water,
- Apply anti-bacterial medication, and
- Bandage the wound, and consider medical attention.
- Teach your children to tell you about any animal bite or scratch that they receive.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

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## **Enjoy a Sweeter (and Healthier) Halloween**

Setting rules for candy-eating is important - and you can do it without being a ghoul.

By Maureen P. Hegarty

Seven year-old Jack is ready for Halloween. He's had his Spider-Man costume picked out since July, and at least once a week he gives his mother a rundown of the candy he must have for his Halloween party. "Mouth-foaming gumballs are high on the list," says Jack's mother, Barbara, who lives in suburban New Jersey. She guarantees that Snickers, jelly pops, and anything that "turns your mouth blue" would make her three sons happy too.



Barbara doesn't approve of too much candy, but Jack and his brothers, Conner, age 12, and Matt, 10, are healthy, active kids, so she feels that occasional sweets are okay. Registered dietician and certified nutritionist Marni Schefter agrees. Schefter insists that depriving children of candy will not help protect them from health risks related to a poor diet. "The key is to teach moderation," says Schefter. How do you keep Halloween sweet without encouraging unhealthy eating habits? A combination of creativity and planning may go a long way to helping you strike a balance.

### **Something Good to Eat**

Let kids enjoy a little bit of trick-or-treat loot at a time - say, two snack-sized candy bars a day. Don't allow candy to substitute for healthy stuff. Plan a healthy breakfast, lunch, and dinner for Halloween day. Serving well-balanced meals should ensure that sweets do not replace essential nutrients. If you're hosting a children's party, serve plenty of fruit and vegetables as well as a kid-friendly meal like pizza. Set up one bucket of candy and let kids take just a few pieces.

### **Alternative Treats**

A growing number of parents are bucking the candy-giving tradition altogether. The 2000 American Express Retail Index estimated that 18% of adults distributed non-candy treats. In some of these homes, children may have special dietary needs. Other parents are alarmed by reports about the increasing rate of child obesity, and some parents just hope to lessen the day's sugar intake.

A recent study even showed that kids welcome such alternatives. Researchers offered trick-or-treaters in five Connecticut neighborhoods two bowls to choose from: one with lollipops or fruit candy and one with inexpensive Halloween-themed trinkets. About half the kids skipped the sweet stuff and took a toy instead. So consider making the switch at your house.

From the grocery:

- sugar-free lollipops
- fruit
- raisins
- granola bars
- popcorn
- trail mix

From the party-supply store (purchased in bulk, these items should cost about 20 cents each):

- plastic vampire teeth
- glow-in-the dark stickers
- temporary tattoos
- spider rings

### More cool options:

crayons and stickers: Crayola makes special crayon packs that feature three Halloween-inspired colors. The cost of twenty packs plus twenty color-in stickers is about \$3.99.

Personalized photos: Start the unique tradition of becoming the neighborhood "phantom photographer." Dig out your child's i-Zone camera and give everyone who comes to the door a sticker picture of himself in costume. At approximately \$18 per three-pack of film, you can expect to spend about 50 cents per trick-or-treater.

### Acts of Sweetness

Halloween is a great time to teach children about sharing. This is a day when kids are inspired to be like Spider-Man or other heroic do-gooders. Encourage their charitable attitude by turning trick-or-treating into a save-the-world mission. In addition to candy, have your child ask for donations for a non-profit organization or school program.

Your family might support the "Trick-or Treat for UNICEF" campaign, a 52-year custom where kids collect donations in their Halloween UNICEF boxes. Contributions fund worldwide medical, education, and emergency relief programs. Visit [www.unicefusa.org/trickortreat](http://www.unicefusa.org/trickortreat) for more information.

LensCrafters and Lions Clubs International also sponsor a Halloween fundraiser called Sight Night. Volunteers gather old eyeglasses that are redistributed to people in need. You can download the materials and information at [www.sightnight.org](http://www.sightnight.org).

Work with your child's teacher or a local community group to create posters and organize kids into "Halloween heroes" who will go door to door to raise money for a local charity. While kids enjoy the thrills of trick-or-treating and dressing up, it won't be "all about the candy."

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## Good Fats vs Bad Fats

(HealthDayNews) -- Warnings about the health dangers of trans fats seem to be everywhere -- and with good reason.



The unhealthiest of all fats, trans fats pose a double threat to your arteries. They raise the level of the bad cholesterol -- low-density lipoprotein (LDL) -- and lower the good cholesterol -- high-density lipoprotein (HDL). They're found in vegetable shortening, some margarines, crackers, candies, baked goods, cookies, snack foods, fried foods, salad dressings and many processed foods, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Trans-fat consumption results in at least 30,000 deaths from heart disease each year in the United States, say Harvard School of Public Health researchers.

To help lower your intake of trans fat, the Harvard Women's Health Watch offers the following advice:

- Read food labels. If a food product lists shortening or hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil as one of its first ingredients, that means it contains a lot of trans fat.
- Do the simple math to figure out trans fat content of foods. Add the polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats to the saturated fats. Subtract that sum from the "Total Fat" listed on the label. The result equals the amount of trans fat in the product.
- Pay attention to margarine. The softer margarine is at room temperature, the lower its trans fat content. The best choices are margarines labeled "trans fat-free."
- Use canola oil or olive oil when frying food. Be careful when eating in restaurants. Foods that are fried in trans fat-laden partially hydrogenated vegetable oil often are labeled as being "cholesterol free" or "cooked in vegetable oil."
- Make your own food when possible. Commercial breads, soups, cereals, dips, salad dressings and packaged entrees usually have hidden trans fats.

The U.S. government's National Library of Medicine offers the following definitions of the different types of fats:

**Saturated fats:** These are the biggest dietary cause of high LDL levels ("bad cholesterol"). When looking at a food label, pay very close attention to the percentage of saturated fat and avoid or limit any foods that are high (for example, over 20 percent saturated fat). Saturated fats are found in animal products such as butter, cheese, whole milk, ice cream, cream, and fatty meats.

**Unsaturated fats:** Fats that help to lower blood cholesterol if used in place of saturated fats. However, unsaturated fats have a lot of calories, so you still need to limit them. There are two types: mono-unsaturated and polyunsaturated. Most (but not all!) liquid vegetable oils are unsaturated.

**Mono-unsaturated fats:** Fats that help to lower blood cholesterol if used in place of saturated fats. However, mono-unsaturated fats have a lot of calories, so you still need to limit them. Examples include olive and canola oils.

**Polyunsaturated fats:** Fats that help to lower blood cholesterol if used in place of saturated fats. However, polyunsaturated fats have a lot of calories, so you still need to limit them. Examples include safflower, sunflower, corn, and soybean oils.

**Trans fatty acids:** These fats form when vegetable oil hardens (a process called hydrogenation) and can raise LDL levels. They can also lower HDL levels ("good cholesterol"). Trans-fatty acids are found in fried foods, commercial baked goods (donuts, cookies, crackers), processed foods, and margarines.

**Hydrogenated:** refers to oils that have become hardened (such as hard butter and margarine). Foods made with hydrogenated oils should be avoided because they contain high levels of trans fatty acids, which are linked to heart disease.

**Partially hydrogenated:** Refers to oils that have become partially hardened. Foods made with partially hydrogenated oils should be avoided because they contain high levels of trans fatty acids, which are linked to heart disease. (Look at the ingredients in the food label.)

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