# 7 Ways to Make Halloween Safer for Kids with Food Allergies By Rima Kleiner, MS, RD, LDN

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* Halloween time can be a season of costumes, scary movies and candy. But for parents of kids with food allergies, there is a different reason to be frightful. Six of the top eight allergens are in high circulation around Halloween. Wheat, milk, soy and even egg are used in many chocolates, caramels and fruit chews. Even more candies are made with or processed on the same equipment as peanuts and tree nuts, such as walnuts, almonds and cashews. Even small amounts of these allergens can cause an anaphylactic reaction in kids who are allergic to them.
* "Parents are responsible for ensuring that their kids are aware of the various strategies to manage their food allergies," says Sonya Angelone, MS, RDN, CLT, who is a Spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. She recommends parents take the time to discuss with their children the allergens that may be hidden in specific foods, including Halloween treats. "Parents also should talk to kids about strategies for when they are attending parties and trick-or-treating, including what to do if they think they are having an allergic reaction," she said. "Parents should be sure that a responsible adult at the party is aware of their child’s allergies." Consider these tips for a safe, allergen-free Halloween.

#### Read All Labels

* This is good advice for all candy, but especially true for miniatures or snack sizes, which sometimes are processed in a different facility than regular-sized candy. The [Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act](http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/Allergens/ucm106890.htm) requires that all FDA-regulated foods list the top eight major allergens in the ingredients list with common names of the allergen included in parentheses — such as "lecithin (soy)" or "whey (milk)." Some packaging includes a note with "Contains …" or "May contain …" statements following the ingredient list. These statements are completely voluntary, so play it safe and read the ingredients list every time, even in products you typically consider "safe." Since many individual bite-size candies don’t contain an ingredients list, look up the ingredients for specific products online to ensure they are safe for your child to eat. If a product is homemade or has no label, throw it out.

#### Talk to Your Neighbors

* Neighbors and friends may want to buy allergen-free candy but don't know what to buy, or may not even know that your child has a food allergy. Share with them what to look for when purchasing candy, or even offer to provide them with "safe" candy that they can hand to your trick-or-treater.

#### Look for the Teal Pumpkins

* Created by [Food Allergy Research & Education](http://www.foodallergy.org/home) in 2014, the Teal Pumpkin Project is a campaign to raise awareness of food allergies and provide safe options for food allergic trick-or-treaters. Participants pledge to put a teal pumpkin outside their homes, indicating they have safe, non-food treats available.

#### Instill the "Always Ask First" Rule

* Carry candy for young children and remind all children not to share food and to ask you before eating anything. "Kids should learn to always read the label before eating any packaged food or candy," says Angelone. "I recommend the 'ask before eating anything' rule. Kids can sort all candy when they return home, and parents can provide ‘safe,’ alternative foods for parties at school or other events. If in doubt, throw it out, trade it or give it away. It’s helpful to make a list of packaged treats that are safe based on individual allergies."

#### Safe at School

* If your child's class celebrates Halloween, take an active role in preventing the risk of a dangerous allergic reaction. Talk to the teachers in advance, volunteer to organize the party, offer to bring the treats or non-food goodies or plan to attend in person and double-check that your child's emergency action plan and epinephrine pens are up-to-date.

#### Trade or Donate

* Before setting out trick-or-treating, make a plan with your child to swap any unsafe candy for another prize such as a safe candy, book or small toy. Or, donate candy to the local food pantry or other charitable organization.

#### Start a New Tradition

Host a costume party at your house, so you are in charge of treats. Or, forgo candy altogether and offer trick-or-treaters a variety of non-candy items such as stickers, glow sticks, bouncy balls or fake mustaches.