WELLNESS BITS & BITES
October 2007

Bittersweet October. The mellow, messy, leaf-kicking, perfect pause between the opposing miseries of summer and winter.

Carol Bishop Hipps

Fun and Healthy Halloween Facts

PUMPKINS

• The world record for the biggest pumpkin is currently a whopping 1,385 pounds!
• Among all the canned fruits and vegetables, pumpkin is the best source of vitamin A. Just a 1/2 cup serving gives you 3 times the recommended daily requirement. So go ahead and indulge in pumpkin bread, pumpkin soup, pumpkin pancakes … you get the picture.
• While pumpkin soup is loaded with vitamin A, it can be loaded with fat – and that’s not good. Most pumpkin soup recipes call for cream. Reduce fat (and calories) by substituting an equal amount of evaporated milk.
• With pumpkin bread, you can reduce fat and calories by applying the Baker’s Light Touch to your favorite recipe. When measuring the fat and sugar, drop down to the next measure in the usual measuring scale. For example, if your recipe calls for 1 cup of sugar or fat, use only 3/4 cup. For measures above 1 cup, reduce the 1 cup to 3/4 cup and reduce the partial cup to the next lower measure. As an example, 1 1/2 cups of sugar would become 3/4 cup plus 1/3 cup.

This technique works with most quick breads and cakes. You may notice that your finished product is just a bit smaller than normal. Also, Light Touch baked goods dry out faster, so do not bake in advance.

CANDY

• Americans spend $2 billion a year on Halloween candy. That’s a lot of candy … and calories!
• More that 35 million pounds of candy corn will be produced this year. That’s enough pieces to circle the moon almost 4 times if laid end to end.
• Deciding what kind of candy to buy for your Halloween visitors? Did you know that chocolate is better for the teeth than hard candy? Chocolate is rinsed more easily from the mouth by saliva, so it is in contact with the teeth for a shorter time.
• With chocolate, think dark. Dark chocolate contains chemicals that are actually good for us.
• Don’t get too carried away by all this good chocolate news – chocolate is still high in fat and calories, so practice portion control. You don’t want the fat goblins to come for you.

**Tips for a Safe and Healthy Fall**

1. Moldy food - Autumn means harvest and that means nuts and grapes are arriving at our grocery stores and farm stands. Unfortunately, you may find mold on some of these autumn treasures. The growth of mold is accelerated by warmth and humidity – which are typical features of fall in our area.

   If you discover mold on nuts (even if it appears to be only on the shells), discard the nuts. The kind of mold that grows on nuts is very likely to produce toxins or poisons. As for mold on grapes, the kind of mold that grows on raw fruits and vegetables does not typically produce toxins, so you can salvage some of your purchase. Discard the moldy grapes along with the grapes immediately surrounding them. Rinse the remaining grapes and use promptly.

   Stop the spread of mold by cleaning areas in your refrigerator where the moldy items were located. Clean the area with soapy water and then rinse with clean water*. Finish by wiping the area with a sanitizing solution of one tablespoon of unscented household chlorine bleach to one gallon of warm water. *It is important to remove all traces of soap before using bleach; the sanitizing ability of bleach is destroyed by soap.

2. Dust and asthma – Before putting out Halloween and Thanksgiving decorations that have been stored away, stop and dust/rinse them. Dust is a major trigger for asthma attacks.

3. Tailgate tricks – If tailgating is a part of your autumn festivities, don’t let cooler temperatures fool you – food still needs to be transported in a cooler to stay at a safe cool temperature, but putting food into a hot cooler to stay cool doesn’t make sense. So if your cooler has been tucked away in the attic or other hot location, go get it and bring it into your kitchen the day before your tailgate event. Lift the cooler’s lid, so the hot air inside can escape and be replaced by cooler indoor air. Starting cool will help you keep your cool.

4. Tick-tock – it’s time to check- When you turn back your clocks for the return of standard time on November 4, check the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

5. Preserve it right – One of my autumn rituals is to make a fresh batch of hot pepper vinegar to top off the collards I enjoy during the winter holidays. Some folks believe that just putting hot peppers into vinegar is adequate, because vinegar is a safe (acid) food. Yes, vinegar is acidic, but it has to get into the peppers to do its preservation magic (i.e., bring food to a pH level where bacteria do not grow).

   Food safety specialists at North Carolina State University suggest this method for making hot pepper vinegar – Start with high-quality peppers. Rinse peppers. Slice or chop peppers; this will help the vinegar get inside the peppers and acidify them. Loosely fill cruet with peppers. (One or two peppers are enough for a jar of vinegar; if the peppers are packed too tightly in the vinegar, the vinegar cannot circulate and get into the peppers.) Cover peppers with boiling vinegar. Let mixture sit for three weeks so the vinegar can enter the peppers and bring their pH to a safe level. The resulting vinegar can be stored at room temperature.

**Pumpkin Dip**

Celebrate autumn with this pumpkin dip. It’s great served with ginger snap cookies. I can’t pass this recipe off as healthy since there is a large amount of sugar, but the pumpkin is full of vitamin A.

4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
16 ounces cream cheese, softened
1 (30-oz.) can pumpkin pie filling
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground ginger

In large mixing bowl, combine sugar and cream cheese, beating till well blended. Beat in remaining ingredients. Store dip in airtight container in refrigerator.

Sincerely,

Susan Noble
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Extension Agent
Family and Consumer Sciences

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