



Fitness Halloween Horrors

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October is a month of transition. For one thing, it's when a welcome break from the summer heat finally comes. For some fitness enthusiasts, this signals the beginning of their outdoor training program. However, for the majority of people, October holds the beginning of a transition of another type, one is far less beneficial to our health. the beginning of... HOLIDAY EATING!

Traditionally, the start of the holiday season, Thanksgiving, is filled with the joys of family and friendship, happy celebrations, and for many... the complete disregard of any fitness or wellness routine. In my years of experience, I've noticed the downward spiral of holiday overeating and drinking actually has its subtle beginnings in Halloween more than it does in Thanksgiving. That is why I'm bringing up this topic for my October column. I'm hoping I can get my message across to South Floridians before the madness of the holiday season begins.

Halloween is a very tricky holiday. Its effect on our diet is subtle. The holiday lacks an obvious "event" where we have the opportunity to sit down and eat ourselves into a coma. No, Halloween is much sneakier. The trouble starts one or two weeks before the 31st at the grocery store, where we notice the potato sack-size bags of Twix and Almond Joy on sale. We buy a few bags to "last us until the 31st." This is the beginning, and for the next week we slowly tap into the "reserves" that were supposed to last two weeks. First, it's one or two Hershey's Kisses. Then we start taking a few candy bars in the car with us. Next thing we know, all the candy is finished and it's only the 26th! By this time, we've addicted ourselves to the cycle of "blood sugar-spike high, insulin-rush low," and now have to buy more for the ghosts and "batmen" coming to our door in a few days; and oh yeah, for ourselves.

Sugar is a very dangerous substance to a fat-loss program. It has an effect on the body's hormones that not only causes extreme swings in energy, but also essentially shuts off its natural fat-burning mechanisms. When sugar enters the bloodstream,

the body signals the pancreas to secrete insulin. It is insulin that allows the body to utilize sugar for energy by helping to transport the sugar into muscle cells. However, once the pancreas starts secreting insulin, it doesn't stop until almost all of the sugar has been transported away. This causes a blood sugar crash, which leaves the person feeling sleepy and lethargic. On top of all this, for the time insulin levels are high in the body, fat-releasing hormones are inhibited and the body enters a fat-preserving state. Couple these factors with all of the extra calories in those candy bars and it's a recipe for a fat-gaining nightmare!

So what can we do to prevent the beginning of the downward spiral? For starters, don't eat candy! Now, this is much easier said than done, so if you must, do so with food in your stomach. A fuller stomach will slow the release of sugar into the bloodstream and thus regulate insulin levels better. Also, try reaching for a protein bar instead of a candy bar. These protein bars essentially taste like candy, but have much less sugar than conventional bars. Just be careful because their calorie content can be just as high as a Snickers or Milky Way. Finally, remember all those people I mentioned in the beginning of the article who were starting their outdoor workouts in October? Why not join them? South Florida is one of the few places in the country that allows outdoor winter workouts in arguably the best weather in the country. Go for a bike ride or roller blade three times per week; or jog over to the local park and throw around a Frisbee. The thing to keep in mind is to get moving and keep moving- a body in motion tends to stay in motion. Good luck and keep an eye out for future articles to help out during the holidays. I'll see you at the park!



Mark Spreizer is an ACE Certified Personal Trainer. He educates, coaches, and empowers clients seeking weight loss, muscle tone, and a healthy lifestyle. For further information on his services visit www.sustainableshape.com, or email him at marks@sustainableshape.com.