

And So It Begins

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It was a dark and stormy night...the wind howled in warning as we took comfort indoors thereby curtailing any outdoor-calorie-burning physical activities. At the strike of twilight on the last day of October, the ritual begins. Children scurry from home to home seeking treats, preferably in the form of wrapped sweets. Even at a very young age, they are already familiar with the process. We all know it and some also dread it. First, it's the fun size candy bar, then the prolonged binge on pie, stuffing and turkey. Following the turkey comes a month of office parties and good cheer. As if that's not enough, there is also the overindulgence during New Year, Super Bowl, and Valentine's Day. The cycle does not cease until the first sign of spring when we might find ourselves nibbling on chocolate bunnies and eggs. By then, we have unconsciously eaten our way through six turbulent months.

Contrary to popular belief, the actual amount of weight gained during this six month storm is usually not as excessive as we think. In fact, the National Institute of Health reported that most Americans only gain about one pound during this eating season. Yes, that is right. One pound. However, this small weight gain accumulates and refuses to budge. Year after year, the weight steadily increases. If this cycle is not broken, the weight will continue to climb with each turn of the season. Not surprisingly, in ten years, we will have attained a total weight gain of 10 pounds. Then we ask ourselves, "How did that happen?"

For many, the weight gain begins in October. However the majority of the weight gain occurs during the months between Thanksgiving and New Year. The weight gained could be the result of the continual consumption of Halloween treats throughout the season along with the larger meals and holiday merriment. If we can curb the consumption of these tasty little indulgences, we may be better at managing our body weight.

There are different strategies that we can implement to minimize the weight gain during the gastrointestinal challenge season. The two most important ones are monitoring what we eat and being physically active. Not only is physical activity effective in helping us to "burn" those extra holiday calories, it is also helpful in improving mood and cardiovascular health. The amount of exercise we need (to ward off the one pound weight gain) is not excessive. Take advantage of the opportunities for physical activity throughout the day. An extra lap here or there or parking as far away from the stores as possible, walking more, taking the stairs, raking the leaves, and/or washing the car. These are all activities that can be incorporated without making us feel like we are exercising. Better yet, we get a clean lawn or car in the process!

Most of us understand that the more we eat, the more weight we gain. Yet, what we tend to forget is that the intake of those small little treats here and there can quickly add up. How many times have we reached for a piece of candy without a thought to the nutritional or calorie content of the food? The most mindless consumption of useless

calories occurs with Halloween candies left in the bowls around the office and the home. By being more aware of how much we actually consume, we may be able to curtail some of these excess calories that lead to weight gain.

Remember, just because they are packaged as cute little miniature versions of their full size original, it does not mean they are calorie free. It is interesting to observe that we can easily refrain from eating a whole candy bar. We all know that a candy bar has a lot of calories and sugar and maybe even fat. However, when the candy is offered in the appealing minuscule version, well, who can say no to that? These fun size candies make it easy to eat 5-6 of them without any consideration of the fact that we just wolfed down the equivalent of two full size candy bars.

Perhaps we would be more mindful of what we eat if there were food labels posted on the miniature wrappers. However, because of their size, it is not possible to stamp a food label on these candies. In addition, no standardization has been established to define what a “fun size” or “snack size” or even “miniature size” is. What makes one size “snack” and the other “fun”? Basically, the size is whatever the candy manufacturer says it is. This can lead to confusion on what an appropriate snack serving is. Thus, we can easily pop them in our mouths one after the other, *almost* guilt free because we refuse to believe that they can contribute *that* many calories. After all, they are so small.

Unfortunately, our body does not take a holiday. Any calories that are consumed need be accounted for. Just because no one saw us eat it does not mean those are (what I call) “invisible calories.” (I wish!) Our body knows what we did. Every calorie matters. It does not matter that the candies were small. It’s similar to the concept of a credit card. Certainly we can go and buy a pair of socks here and there and we will come home thinking we didn’t spend that much because we didn’t buy a whole outfit. But if we buy socks everyday, three-to four times a day, pretty soon we will see the damage done when we get our credit card bill.

Being aware of how many calories are in some of the treats is the first step to understanding how your weight can begin to creep up. Knowing that these treats will be readily available in the upcoming months, it is best to control the situation by limiting ourselves to one treat a day. We can also counter these extra calories by being more physically active each day. In addition, have a back-up snack available for when hunger strikes us when we least expect it. When we are working late at the office our stomach will remind us that we need nourishment—any kind of nourishment. In this situation, we could cave into the temptations of those handy miniature candies. However, by packing a piece of fruit or whole grain crackers, we would be less tempted to reach for the candy bowl. The snacks will fill us up without loading us up with sugar and excess calories. This will buy us some time (delay hunger) until we are able to eat a healthy meal.

Just how many calories does each of these snack size treats contain? The caloric content on some of these snack size candies are alarming. Below is a list of the most popular Trick or Treat candies and their calorie content (from [The Daily Plate](#) and [About.com](#)).

| Candy | Size | Calories | Candy | Size | Calories |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Almond Joy | 1 snack size | 91 | Nestle's Crunch | 1 fun size | 50 |
| Baby Ruth bar | 1 fun size | 85 | Nestle's Crunch caramel | 1 fun size | 70 |
| Brach's Caramels, | 1 piece | 40 | Oh Henry! (26 grams) | 1 fun size | 120 |
| Butterfinger | 1 fun size | 85 | 100 Grand bar | 1 fun size | 95 |
| Butterfinger | 1 bite size (7 grams) | 31 | Payday | 1 snack size | 90 |
| Butterfinger- crisp bar | 1 fun size | 100 | Raisinettes | 1 fun size | 56 |
| Candy Corn, Brach's | 11 pieces | 70 | Reese's Peanut Butter Cup | 1 miniature | 44 |
| Dove Milk Chocolate | 1 wrapped square (8 grams) | 42 | Reese's Peanut Butter Cup | 1 snack size (1 'cup') | 88 |
| 5 th Avenue | 1 snack bar | 77 | Reese's white | 1 snack size | 100 |
| 5 th Avenue | 1 miniature bar (10 grams) | 52 | Reese's Crispy Crunch bar | 1 snack size | 95 |
| Heath bar | 1 snack size | 74 | Reese's Nutrageous bar | 1 snack size | 88 |
| Hershey's Kisses-milk chocolate | 1 kiss | 26 | Reese's Whipped bar | 1 snack size | 60 |
| Hershey's Kisses-with almonds | 1 kiss | 23 | Rocky Road | 1 snack size | 45 |
| Hershey's Kisses-with caramel | 1 kiss | 21 | Skittles - Original Fruit | 1 fun size | 80 |
| Hershey's milk chocolate bar | 1 fun size | 67 | Snickers | 1 miniature bar | 38 |
| Hershey's bars | 1 miniature bar | 42 | Smarties Candy | 1 roll | 25 |
| Hot Tamales | 1 small package (14 grams) | 50 | Snickers | 1 fun size | 80 |
| Jolly Rancher | 1 lollipop | 60 | Snickers-Almond bar | 1 fun size | 80 |
| Jolly Rancher | 1 stick (11 grams) | 43 | Starburst | 1 fun size (2 pieces) | 40 |
| Jr. Mints | 1 fun size | 50 | 3 Musketeers | 1 fun size | 60 |
| Kit Kat | 1 fun size | 73 | 3 Musketeers | 1 miniature bar | 38 |
| Laffy Taffy, Chocolate | 1 small bar | 32 | 3 Musketeers- mint flavor | 1 fun size | 64 |
| Lifesavers Gummies | 1 roll (5 gummies) | 52 | Tootsie Pop | 1 lollipop | 60 |
| M & M, plain | 1 fun size | 88 | Tootsie Roll | 1 small bar | 50 |
| M & M, peanut | 1 fun size | 93 | Tootsie Roll | 1 midgee | 23 |
| Mike and Ike | 1 small box (14 | 50 | Twix | 1 miniature | 50 |

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|--------------------|-----------------|----|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----|
| | grams) | | | (10 grams) | |
| Milk Duds | 1 snack size | 54 | Twix | 1 fun size (16 grams) | 80 |
| Milky Way | 1 miniature bar | 38 | Twix- Peanut butter | 1 fun size (16 grams) | 86 |
| Milky Way | 1 fun size | 75 | Twizzlers - Strawberry Twists | 1 short (9 grams) | 32 |
| Milky Way-Midnight | 1 fun size | 84 | Whoppers | 1 small tube | 30 |
| Milky Way-Midnight | 1 miniature | 33 | Whoppers | 1 small pouch | 100 |
| Mr. Goodbar | 1 snack size | 90 | Wonka Nerds | 1 small box (13 grams) | 50 |
| Mounds bars | 1 snack size | 92 | York Peppermint Patties | 1 small patty (14 grams) | 53 |

The holiday season does not have to be one filled with dread. Realize that you will be tempted and that many of these fun size treats are high in calories. The fun size or snack size can be just right to curb that sweet tooth craving. The smaller serving size allows us to enjoy the flavor and taste without destroying our healthy eating goal. However, eating more of these treats on a daily basis will lead to a higher “credit card bill” at the end and we all know how hard it is to get out of debt.

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