Wouldn’t it be great if all foods were healthy for your body? Unfortunately, many foods that are often advertised don’t help build healthy bodies and minds for our growing children, and some have such high amounts of added sugar and fat that they can be harmful over time. We can help our children recognize which foods are better choices with GO, SLOW and WHOA.

WHAT FOODS HELP KEEP MY HEART, MUSCLES AND BONES STRONG?

The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) offers a great way to teach children abstract concepts such as “healthy” and “unhealthy” snacks.

These are called “GO, SLOW and WHOA” foods.

**GO FOODS** are foods that can be eaten “almost any time”. They are lowest in added sugar and fat. They have a lot of vitamins and minerals.

*Examples: Fruits and vegetables.*

**WHOA FOODS** are foods that should only be eaten “once in a while” and in small portions. They are loaded with lots of added sugar and fat. Typically, they are low in vitamins and minerals.

*Examples: Ice cream sundae, soda, cookies, chips, doughnuts, French fries.*

The National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute (NHLBI) recognizes another important mid-range category called SLOW foods that fall between GO and WHOA. SLOW foods can be eaten “sometimes, or less often.” Examples include veggie pizza, ice cream and 100% fruit juice. While they may have some GO qualities (e.g. veggie pizza has cheese and vegetables, ice cream has milk, apple juice is a fruit juice), they are considered SLOW because they can also be higher in fat and sugar.

While it is important to recognize what SLOW foods are, they are not typically part of the discussion with preschool children as they are concrete thinkers, seeing the world in black and white.

Introducing a third category often confuses the child’s basic understanding of GO and WHOA foods.
OFFER THESE HEALTHIER SNACKS TO YOUR CHILD

Serve refreshing GO water instead of a WHOA soda.

Offer naturally sweet GO foods such as canned or fresh fruit instead of WHOA foods like cookies or other sweets.

Use color to brighten up snack time by serving 2 or more differently colored GO fruits or vegetables together.

Choose apple slices instead of French Fries (which are fried making them a WHOA food).

WHEN PREPARING FOODS FOR YOUR CHILD, TRY THESE HELPFUL TIPS!

- Make your own GO “soda” by adding a splash of 100% fruit juice to sparkling water instead of pouring a WHOA soda.
- Try baking, broiling, or grilling instead of frying (roasted chicken is a GO food, but fried chicken is a WHOA food).
- Try roasted or grilled vegetables that are GO foods, but become a WHOA food when fried or cooked with butter.
- Top an English muffin pizza with low-fat cheese for a GO food, rather than serving up a WHOA food like pepperoni pizza.
- Serve GO vegetables in a variety of their textures, for example a sweet potato may be baked in wedges, microwaved in slices, served raw in sticks, or mashed.

While it is important to offer children a variety of healthy foods to try, never pressure them. Sometimes a child doesn’t accept a new food on the first try, so food should be offered more than once, but not forced or used with negative language.

REFERENCES
National Heart, Lung, Blood Institute