



GO, SLOW and WHOA FOODS

Kids can make healthy choices by categorizing foods!



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Wouldn't it be great if all foods were healthy for your body? Unfortunately, many foods don't help build healthy bodies and minds for our growing children, and some have high amounts of added sugar and fat that can be harmful. Helping children make healthy food choices can be challenging.

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

The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) offers a great way to help children make healthy snack choices by categorizing snacks into “**GO**, **SLOW** and **WHOA**” foods. Adults understand the difference based on the context in which words are used, but young children do not. Therefore, using the terms “good” and “bad” to describe a snack to young children should focus on taste only, not nutritional value or health.

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

Examples: Fruits and vegetables.

WHOA FOODS are foods that should only be eaten “*once in a while*” and in small portions. Typically, they are low in vitamins and minerals and have large amounts of added sugar and fat.
Examples: Soda, cookies, chips, doughnuts, French fries.

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** food qualities (e.g. veggie pizza has cheese and vegetables, ice cream has milk, apple juice is a fruit juice), they are considered **SLOW** foods because they can also be higher in fat and sugar.

Examples: Veggie pizza, ice cream, and 100% fruit juice.

JUST FOR PRESCHOOLERS:

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 CHILDREN

Serve water, a refreshing **GO** beverage instead of soda, a **WHOA** beverage. Offer naturally sweet **GO** foods, such as canned or fresh fruit, instead of **WHOA** foods, such as cookies or other sweets.

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

Choose apple slices, a **GO** food, instead of French fries, a **WHOA** food because they are fried.

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

WHEN PREPARING FOODS FOR CHILDREN, TRY THESE HELPFUL TIPS!

- Make your own **GO** "soda" by adding a splash of 100% fruit juice to sparkling water instead of



serving a **WHOA** soda.

- Try baking, broiling, or grilling instead of frying (oven baked chicken nuggets are a **GO** food, but fried chicken is a **WHOA** food).
- Top a whole grain English muffin with pizza sauce and low-fat cheese for a **GO** food, rather than serving up a **WHOA** food like pepperoni pizza.
- Serve **GO** vegetables in a variety of shapes and textures, for example a sweet potato may be baked in wedges, microwaved in slices or mashed.

REFERENCES

National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2013). Eat Right. We Can! <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/eat-right/index.html>
We Can! and Eat, Play, Grow are educational resources of NIHBI.nih.gov.



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