

GOOD FOOD OR BAD FOOD?

by Kellie Hunziker, MS RD

When did you start categorizing food as "good" or "bad"? _____

Who taught you how to do this? _____

We may attach these labels to foods, but are foods really good or bad? For example, what does a piece of chocolate cake do that is bad? _____

Write an example of a "good" and "bad" food and share why you call it "good" or "bad". _____

How has the "good" or "bad" way of thinking about foods affected you and your eating? _____

Categorizing foods like this is called "black and white thinking", there are many pitfalls to this way of thinking. So, why do we do it? We may fall into black and white thinking as a way to simplify things in our life that seem very complicated or hard to control. It can seem very complicated to know how to eat a healthy diet or to maintain a healthy weight. Therefore, some people use strict rules or black and white thinking to try to handle the overwhelming decisions about what to eat every day. Most often, black and white thinking doesn't help you to obtain a balanced way of eating that you enjoy, but it leads to a preoccupation with food and weight which can turn into an eating disorder.

To recover from an eating disorder you have to take foods out of the "good" and "bad" categories. In other words, you have to legalize *all* foods before you begin to eat appropriate amounts without guilt.

What does "legalize all foods" mean to you? How does the thought of it make you feel? _____

Will we be healthy if we feel free to eat whatever we want? If you eat within the context of hunger and fullness, the chances are pretty good! Chances are that you like all kinds of foods, and if you had all of them available with no negativity, fear or obligation attached, you would make choices that are more balanced and satisfying.

Start a new way of thinking about foods. List foods from each food group (including fats, oil and sweets) that you like. Consider adjusting how much or how often you eat these foods. Do not rule out any food. No food is "bad". Would you consider trying new foods to balance out your choices and to add more variety?

Knowledge of the food guide pyramid helps us in knowing what a healthy diet is, but we can't make choices we enjoy or feel good about unless we make peace with food first. In her book "Making Peace with Food", Susan Kano says, "Within your freedom of recovery you will have to decide what you want to eat and how much you want to exercise...I have been teaching you to attain freedom from your preoccupations, not to relinquish responsibility for your own choices. Everyone must choose his/her own lifestyle."