

## Finding the Right Balance

*By Karen Hallford, MS, RD, LD*

Have you ever wondered how much energy your body needs? The amount of energy someone requires can vary from person to person and depends on activity level. Food is like fuel for our bodies, just like gasoline is fuel for our cars. For kids, energy from food is needed for proper growth and development, in addition to physical activities like sports. Even if we slept all day long, our bodies would still need energy from food to stay alive. Energy balance means eating enough food to keep our bodies in motion but not too much to cause excess weight gain, which can keep us from doing the activities that we love. This is called Energy Balance.

The key to getting enough energy, but not too much, is to balance your activities and the amount of fuel that you consume. You can easily do this by eating when you are hungry, stopping when you are full and getting plenty of exercise. Teaching your children to listen to their bodies and look for hunger and satiety cues is critical. Listed here are a few tips when trying to find that balance:

1. Never let yourself get overly hungry which can make you feel weak or dizzy. Plan for long periods of time between meals by packing healthy snacks and drinking plenty of water.
2. Stay on track with meals and snacks from day to day. Your body will get use to the routine and keep you from having waves of extreme hunger which usually ends in over eating.
3. Allow your body to rest after a meal for at least 20 minutes before deciding that you want seconds. It takes time for your stomach to signal your brain with the message of fullness.
4. Never use food as a reward or as a punishment. Food is for fuel and using it in these ways can create confusion for kids.

Have any of you eaten so much that your stomach hurts? Teach your children to listen to their bodies and to eat just the right amount. Their bodies will thank them for it by giving them plenty of energy and brainpower to make it through their busy day.