You need to drive the kids to ballet class and soccer practice, and you need to complete a report for your boss by 10:00 the next morning. And you still need to decide what’s for dinner.

The key to healthful eating and healthy families is knowing what nutritious foods you want your family to eat, preparing food in advance to avoid last minute fattening choices, and gathering together the family for mealtime.

Here’s what you need to know about weight control and eating to stay healthy. They are not exactly the same.

**Weight Control**

The key to weight control is calories in, calories out. Family members who want to control their weight need to eat and drink fewer calories than they burn off when they exercise, sit, and sleep everyday. Calories vary by age and sex, and although it doesn’t seem fair, women burn off fewer calories than men. Experts estimate the following calorie requirements for you and your family:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Light Physical Activity</th>
<th>Moderately Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9-13</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9-13</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19-30</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19-30</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>over 50</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>over 50</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For every additional two miles of brisk walking you do each day, or equivalent exercise, you can add approximately 200 calories.

For ages that are not listed, calorie requirements can be estimated from the information provided, or visit [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/learn-it/balance.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/learn-it/balance.htm)
Eating Habits of Healthy Families

It’s important to pay attention to what you eat. Fresh fruits and vegetables are good for everyone, most fats should be eaten in small quantities (and avoid transfats and saturated fats), and calcium and vitamins are essential.

Restaurant meals are not necessarily better for you than fast foods. The vegetables and sauces may be made with butter, cream, or other high fat ingredients. Chain restaurants have Web sites that often provide calorie and fat content for their meals. Print the information so you’ll have it to help you make better meal choices.

Cooking Meals the Easy Way

Preparing meals in advance, making shopping lists, and doing grocery shopping on a specific day can help make cooking more manageable. Try to find time to create a couple of meals that are easy to warm up and provide a healthy alternative to fast food.

Health Tips

Here are a few helpful guidelines for you to remember:

♦ Chicken and fish are usually better for you than beef, but not if you fry them or prepare them with lots of butter or oil.
♦ Baking or grilling is healthier than frying.
♦ Fiber is also important from fruits, veggies, certain breads (check the nutritional content), and whole grains.
♦ If your salad contains dressing, cheese, eggs, meat or fried chicken, it may be high in calories and fat. So if your family loves burgers, it makes more sense to occasionally eat burgers rather than more frequently eat fattening salads.
♦ Fruit drinks, soda, and alcohol are fattening, and they don’t fill you up. You can keep everyone’s weight down by replacing high calorie drinks with low calorie drinks and by avoiding large sized drinks. Don’t forget low-fat milk or calcium-fortified juice for your kids. They are not low in calories, but the calcium is important.

Fast foods don’t have to be fattening, but they often are. It’s not always obvious. For example, McDonald’s Caesar Salad with Crispy Chicken and dressing contains 490 calories and 13 grams of fat and a McDonald’s Big Mac has 560 calories and 30 grams of fat. That isn’t much of a difference in calories! In fact, salads at many food chains are high in calories and fat. And adding fries or a shake can double the amount of calories or fat. So, check fast food chain Web sites or ask the cashier for calorie and nutrition pamphlets or posters before you order.

If you cook your own meals, you control what is in them. If you use prepared foods, check the ingredients and calories on the package before you buy.

Snacks

If your family likes to snack, provide healthy choices that include fruit and low-fat cheese sticks or chocolate milk. Snacks at regular times throughout the day can be part of a nutritious diet. Cookies and candy are fine in moderation — but not in unlimited amounts and not every day.

Gather together for mealtime

Research shows that families that eat together are usually healthier, happier families. Family meals help parents ensure that children are eating right and give them a chance to learn about their kids’ lives. Teenagers who eat with their families regularly are less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol or to get into trouble in other ways.

Research also shows that TV and eating are a dangerous combination. Whether snacks or meals, eating while watching TV tends to cause weight gain. One simple rule — “no one eats in front of the TV” — will keep your family healthier and will probably help your kids do better in school.