



FIGURE 6.6 Maintaining a steady weight requires you to balance the amount of food you eat and the amount of energy you use.

[**Dieting** is an attempt to lose weight by restricting the intake of certain foods or reducing the amount of food eaten. In a more general sense, the term refers to manipulating food intake to achieve a desired outcome, such as achieving a high level of fitness for a competition.]

[A **fad diet** is a type of diet that promises rapid weight loss in a short period of time.]

HEALTH FACT

A study of over 1300 Australian secondary students showed that 57 per cent of girls and 18 per cent of boys had dieted at some time. A higher frequency of dieting, and of dieting at a young age, created problems among young women that are associated with poor physical and mental health (including depression), more disordered eating (bingeing and purging), weight and shape dissatisfaction, and more frequent general health problems.

Source: NSW Health 2004, *Eat well: NSW Strategic Directions for Public Health Nutrition.*

Diets and dieting

Young people's concern about their weight or the way their body looks can lead some to try **dieting**. Books, magazines and weight loss groups provide a vast range of diets for people who want to lose weight.

Controlling your weight is best done by making gradual changes to your eating habits and levels of activity over a period of time. It is recommended that young people talk to a qualified person such as a dietitian, nutritionist or doctor before trying to lose weight, as diets can affect growth and restrict the dieter's intake of essential nutrients.

Fad diets

Diets that promise quick weight loss in a short period are generally called 'crash diets' or **fad diets**. Examples of fad diets are the 'grape-fruit diet' and the 'Hollywood 48-hour miracle diet'. Research has shown that these types of fad diet do not work. The body starts to store more fat because it thinks it has been starved, and any weight loss comes from water and muscle, not fat. At the same time, less fat is burnt off because the body's metabolism slows down to conserve energy. This means that when the person stops dieting and returns to regular eating habits, weight is put on even more quickly.

Fad diets are also dangerous, particularly for young people, because they:

- limit certain food groups
- do not contain a balance of nutrients
- do not provide enough kilojoules to meet daily needs.