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***Tips for Teachers:***  
**Food Experiences are Rich in School Readiness Opportunities**

While discussions about food might not seem like an obvious choice to build children's school readiness, these discussions can actually provide rich opportunities to reinforce pre-academics. For example, if your program provides lunches or snacks, provide a literacy opportunity for children by posting the lunch and/or snack menu printed in large letters with pictures of the food items attached. Children can "read" the menu each day. Or post the menu for the next day's lunch or snack and have children "read" it before leaving that day.

As most programs have a rotating meal/snack cycle, you could gradually develop a file of each lunch or snack menu and accompanying pictures that could be used whenever that lunch or snack was served. Children can regularly consult the menu and learn to associate the words with the pictures. As children show readiness, consider using menus with the words only. If you are feeling really creative, children can try to identify the words first from the print only, but then can open a "flap" which hides a picture of the food item.

Other ideas:

- Make "menus" for a pretend restaurant in the dramatic area with food words and pictures that children can "read" and order.
- Make checking the menu a daily routine. Provide guidance to decode words "Here's how I know this word might be "soup." It starts with "s" and that sounds like "ssss".
- Ask questions like "How many words are here for this food?" That helps children understand that there are spaces between each distinct word.
- Menu discussions are also a great spring board for talking about healthy and unhealthy foods, another important area for children to know about.
- An internet search will lead to many choices of children's cookbooks. Some focus specifically on healthy choices; others on specific ethnic foods. Learning to decipher a cookbook can be a good pre-reading experience for young children. With your help, children can begin to make the connection that the letters and numbers in the cook book tell you which foods and how much to put together to make the recipe. For example, you say "This says we need 2 cups of flour. Let's measure 2 cups of flour together. . . What comes after the flour?"

Discussing or preparing food with children provides rich opportunities to reinforce pre-academic skills. Children can follow the menu (prereading), count out what is needed (math) and watch how ingredients change when combined (science). Look for every opportunity to reinforce learning with children. Activities with food are great ways to do this.

Resource:

Resource: Neuman, S. B., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices with Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.