



Food, Nutrition & Healthy Eating Policy

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Our Values

Food at Young Friends is nourishment — not just of the body, but of the mind, the planet, and the community.

Children are immersed in a culture of respect for food, real cooking, and joyful, informed eating.

- **Sustainability** – Every choice reflects care for the earth and our bodies
 - **Respect** – Children are active participants, not passive consumers
 - **Authenticity** – No packets, no pretence — just real food made from scratch
 - **Supportive Leadership** – Staff guide through shared experience and modelling
 - **Community** – Meals are moments of connection, learning and belonging
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Policy Statement

We provide a carefully designed, fully plant-based diet that supports healthy growth, emotional wellbeing and positive relationships with food.

Food is not separate from our curriculum — it is central to it.

Nutritional Approach & Excellence

At Young Friends, our menu is intentionally designed to meet and exceed the nutritional needs of young children within a plant-based framework.

We take our responsibility seriously in ensuring children receive a nutritionally complete and balanced diet. Our menus are regularly reviewed and informed by nutritional guidance to ensure children receive:

- Protein from diverse plant sources including lentils, beans, chickpeas, tofu and whole grains
- Omega-3 fatty acids from chia seeds, flaxseeds and hemp seeds
- Iron-rich foods such as legumes and leafy greens, supported by vitamin C for absorption
- Calcium through fortified oat milk, tahini, pulses and greens
- Vitamin B12 through fortified foods and nutritional yeast

We actively enhance nutrition through preparation:

- Seeds including **chia, flax, pumpkin and sunflower** are milled to increase bioavailability of omega-3 fatty acids, fibre, protein, zinc and magnesium
- Nutritional yeast is used to provide B vitamins, including B12
- Pulses are combined with grains to create complete protein profiles
- Fresh herbs and vegetables are used to maximise micronutrient intake

All puddings and baked goods use **natural sugars only** (fruit, dates, agave syrup), avoiding refined sugar while supporting a positive food culture.

Why Plant-Based

Our approach is grounded in both ethics and evidence.

A well-planned plant-based diet:

- Is naturally high in fibre, supporting digestion and gut health
- Provides a wide range of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants
- Supports a diverse gut microbiome, linked to immune health
- Reduces intake of saturated fats found in animal products

We ensure our approach is not restrictive, but expansive — exposing children to a wide variety of foods, flavours and nutrients.

What We Serve

All food is:

- 100% plant-based
- Cooked fresh from scratch daily
- Free from ultra-processed ingredients
- Rich in vegetables, legumes, grains, seeds and herbs
- Seasonally inspired

We make our own oat milk, fortified with calcium and B12.

Food as Curriculum (Seed to Plate)

Children are actively involved in:

- Growing herbs and produce
- Preparing meals using real tools
- Cooking, baking and making oat milk
- Learning where food comes from
- Understanding nutrition through real experiences

This builds lifelong knowledge and respect for food.

Daily Nutritional Practice

We maximise nutrition across the day:

- Snacks include homemade dips (e.g. hummus, bean spreads, seed blends) to increase protein and healthy fats
 - Meals are layered with seeds and nutrient-dense ingredients
 - Fresh preparation preserves nutrients
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Food Provided by Families

Where families provide food (e.g. funded-only places):

- Food must be **plant-based**
- Food must align with our approach to safety, consistency and nutrition
- Ingredients must be clearly known
- Cooked meal

Packed lunches items such sandwiches and crisps are not accepted.

If the ingredients are not known or the lunch does not align with our ethos then your child will be served the same meal as the rest of the children and you will be charged for this.

Mealtimes as Practice

- Calm, shared, social experience

- Staff sit and model behaviour
 - Children encouraged to listen to hunger cues
 - No pressure, no reward-based eating
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Portion Sizes

- Based on child's fist
 - Seconds offered fairly
 - Focus on reducing waste
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Sustainability

Children are involved in:

- Composting
 - Reducing waste
 - Repurposing food
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Impact on Children

Children at Young Friends:

- Develop a positive relationship with food
 - Are confident trying new foods
 - Understand where food comes from
 - Experience a wide range of nutrients and flavours
 - Learn that food is part of caring for themselves, others and the planet
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Monitoring

- Menus reviewed termly
- Nutrition considered regularly
- Children's eating monitored

Impact on Children's Development, Wellbeing and Behaviour

At Young Friends, our approach to food goes far beyond nutrition. It directly supports children's emotional wellbeing, behaviour, and overall development.

Children experience a calm, consistent and nurturing environment where food is predictable, shared and respected. This contributes to:

- **Emotional security** – shared meals, consistent routines and familiar foods support children in feeling safe and settled
 - **Positive behaviour** – calm, unhurried mealtimes reduce overwhelm and support self-regulation
 - **Confidence and independence** – children are trusted with real tasks, from preparing food to serving and clearing
 - **Language development** – rich conversations at the table build vocabulary, turn-taking and listening skills
 - **Social development** – children learn to eat together, wait, share, and engage respectfully with others
 - **Healthy relationships with food** – no pressure, no rewards, and no restrictions create a positive, lifelong approach to eating
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Connection to Environment and Nature

Our food culture is deeply connected to our environment.

Children regularly eat outdoors in our woodland garden, experiencing fresh air, natural light and seasonal change. This strengthens their connection to nature and enhances wellbeing.

Through gardening, harvesting and outdoor cooking experiences, children develop an understanding of:

- where food comes from
- how it grows
- how it connects to the seasons
- how to care for the natural world

This connection supports:

- improved mood and emotional regulation
 - curiosity and engagement
 - a sense of responsibility and belonging
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Long-Term Impact

Children leaving Young Friends demonstrate:

- confidence in trying new foods
- an understanding of nutrition and wellbeing
- respect for food, the environment and each other
- strong social and communication skills
- an embedded awareness that food is part of caring for themselves and the world around them

Our approach supports not only healthy bodies, but thoughtful, capable and environmentally aware individuals.