



ARFID: AVOIDANT RESTRICTIVE FOOD INTAKE DISORDER

WHAT IS ARFID?

Avoidant-Restrictive Food Intake Disorder is a new eating disorder identified in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. ARFID is a condition in which a person has a disturbance in eating that negatively affects their physical or emotional well-being. ARFID is a very diverse eating disorder; some individuals with ARFID are extreme picky eaters, other have specific fears about eating, and others just have a generally poor appetite or no interest in food. While some of these behaviors may be developmentally normative or reasonable, they go from being a “phase” or a “quirk” to an eating disorder if they are associated with any of the following:

- + Weight loss
- + Lack of weight gain or poor growth
- + Dependence on meal-supplement shakes (e.g., Ensure, Carnation Instant Breakfast)
- + Dependence on tube feeding
- + Nutritional deficiencies (e.g., anemia)
- + Emotional distress
- + Academic impairment
- + Social impairment

ARFID is different from other eating disorders in that the eating problems are not motivated by a desire to lose weight or a dissatisfaction with shape or looks. However, ARFID is just as serious as other more “classic” eating disorders. Individuals with ARFID are at high risk for developing other psychological disorders, such as anxiety disorders and depression. Individuals with ARFID are also at high risk for physical complications, including weight loss, fatigue, dizziness, heart problems, bone density problems, and kidney problems.

Picky eating is a normal pattern of childhood eating. However, not all picky eating is harmless and even moderate levels of picky eating can seriously impact a child’s well-being. Parents should seek their gut and seek an assessment to determine whether your child’s picky eating is just a phase or a more serious problem.

UC SAN DIEGO EATING DISORDERS CENTER

Contact us today for a free assessment, to schedule a talk for your clinic or school, and/or to learn more about our services and programs.



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HOW TO IDENTIFY ARFID: THE 3 TYPES

1. The Picky Eater

- + Limited range of preferred foods
- + Avoids whole food groups (e.g., proteins, dairy)
- + Food preferences based on brand, temperature, color, texture, taste
- + Refuses to try new foods
- + Refuses to try familiar foods
- + Gags in response to trying non-preferred foods
- + May have nutritional deficiencies (e.g., anemia)
- + **Range of preferred foods have become narrower over time**
- + **Picky eating has persisted longer than 2 years**
- + **Picky eating unresolved by late childhood**

2. Food Fears

- + Avoids specific foods or food groups
- + Fearful that something bad will happen after eating avoided foods
- + Eating habits may have changed following a traumatic incident
- + May have frequent complaints of stomach upset, headaches, nausea
- + Weight loss associated with change in eating habits
- + May fear...
 - Stomach pain/nausea
 - Exacerbating an existing medical condition
 - Allergic reaction
 - Choking
 - Vomiting

3. Poor Appetite

- + Denies feeling hungry
- + Feels full quickly while eating
- + Comfortable skipping meals/going long periods of time without eating
- + No strong "drive" to eat
- + Not noticeably excited by or interested in food
- + Hides or throws food away
- + May have complaints or stomach upset, headaches, or nausea
- + May lack insight into poor eating habits
- + Poor eating habits may have been long standing or be a recent change

TREATMENT

If you suspect that your child has ARFID, seek out the help of an eating disorder specialist who can assist you in determining if your child has a problem. Currently, there are no formal treatment guidelines available for ARFID, but research suggests that the following elements and approaches may be helpful in a treatment program or provider:

- + Family-based approach
- + Multidisciplinary team
- + Cognitive-behavioral techniques
- + Exposure and response prevention techniques
- + Biofeedback
- + Mindfulness
- + Experience treating eating disorders, feeding disorders, anxiety disorders, and/or chronic pain

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