

ABUHB ARFID

(Avoidant and Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) Service

What is ARFID?

Information for families and professionals

Typical Child Eating Development

Between the ages of around 14 months – 8 years it is typical for children to experience **'neophobia'**; a general fear of trying new foods. This often leads to refusal in the first instance. Acceptance and rejection stages are normal. Children will usually naturally outgrow this stage through watching and imitating others and as taste buds change.



How does this differ in ARFID?

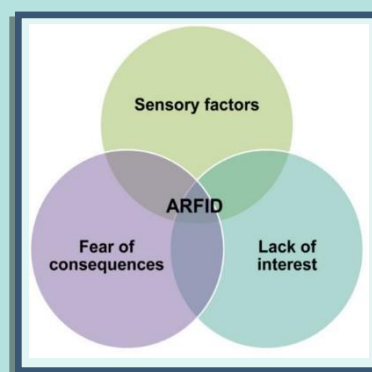
Children and young people with ARFID do not grow out of the neophobic stage. The fear and anxiety around new and different food results in more foods being lost from a child's diet, or not being added, because of small details e.g. packaging/ brands/presentation. Children and young people with restrictive eating do not copy others and show little enjoyment or may be distressed around food (even in social situations they would usually enjoy).

PLEASE NOTE: A diagnosis of ARFID can only be given by a medical or healthcare professional.

What is ARFID?

ARFID is a feeding and eating disorder where children and young people have severe selective eating difficulties. They experience food in a different way which causes them fear and anxiety. They try to manage this by only eating foods that feel safe.

There are three main types of difficulties that people with ARFID can experience. Some experience one, two or all three of these difficulties:



1) Sensory Sensitivity

Some young people are sensitive to smell, taste, texture, look and colour. This means they notice when foods are even slightly different than they are expecting. If a food is even slightly different, this makes children and young people feel anxious and want to not eat the food. To manage this, they prefer more predictable tastes and textures (e.g. crunchy/dry textures or colorless and bland foods). They can have a preference for certain brands/packaging because the foods always taste and feel the same.

2) Lack of Interest

An ongoing low interest in food can mean not experiencing or recognising hunger cues, always feeling full, and preference for doing something else. Some young people describe eating and mealtimes feeling like a chore.

3) Fear of Aversive Consequences

Young people with ARFID might worry about choking, vomiting or pain when they eat. This can sometimes happen when they have experienced a specific traumatic life event related to eating (e.g. allergic reactions, choking episodes). This leads to avoidance and fear of eating.

Symptoms

A young person with ARFID may display some of the following:

- Significant and continual weight loss or poor weight gain and growth in children;
- Very low interest in eating and a highly selective food range (e.g a young person may be eating less than 20 different foods)
- Failure to meet overall energy/nutritional needs (e.g low iron, calcium and vitamin D). This can result in a significant nutritional deficiency. This is determined by a blood test.
- Reliance on oral nutritional supplements and drinks (e.g prescribed nutrition drinks); and/or some young people may require feeding via a tube
- Significant impact on daily functioning and social wellbeing (such as going to school/college, or avoidance of social events with friends and family where food may be involved).

What wouldn't be considered ARFID?

- Temporary changes in eating (e.g due to illness, mood changes, puberty or stressful life periods like transition to school or bereavement)
- Resulting from concerns about body shape/weight
- Children who are not eating due to a long-term medical or psychological condition that interferes with their ability to eat
- Eating difficulties which are a result of a lack of available food or due to cultural practices



Support and Resources

If you are concerned that your child may have ARFID, you can:

Speak with: your GP, health visitor, your child's school nurse, or your child's medical team if they have one (e.g a Paediatrician or Dietitian) in the first instance

Some useful books and websites are:

- Food Refusal and Avoidant Eating in Children; A practical guide for parents and professionals by Gillian Harris and Elizabeth Shea
- ARFID; Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder- A guide for parents and carers by Rachel Bryant-Waugh
- Helping Children Develop a Positive Relationship With Food by Jo Cormack
- BEAT - <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/types/arfid>
- <https://www.arfidawarenessuk.org/>

Our service aims to raise awareness of ARFID and provide resources. We run regular workshops and masterclasses for parents/carers as well as schools. We also offer advice and consultation to professionals and families who access our service, as well as our specialist assessment clinics. If you would like to find out more information, please contact our team using the email below.

PLEASE NOTE: Referrals into our service can be made by professionals only, typically via SPACE-Wellbeing ED-CET or secondary care Consultant Paediatricians and Dietitians.

Contact: ABB.PaediatricPsychology@wales.nhs.uk