



Orri

ARFID:

Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder

A guide for Eating Disorders Awareness Week



What is ARFID?

ARFID, an abbreviation for Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder, is an eating disorder distinguished by avoidant or restrictive food preferences, affecting about 1% of children and 5% of adults – although we believe it's likely many more individuals are struggling than statistics show. Formerly referred to as 'Selective Eating', ARFID was only recently recognised in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 2013.

For this reason, despite its prevalence ARFID remains relatively unknown compared to other eating disorders. ARFID can manifest across all age groups, from children to adults, with a higher incidence in early childhood and the potential to persist into adulthood if left untreated.

What are the symptoms?

Like other eating disorders, there is no 'one way' to experience ARFID, meaning that each person's experience will be unique to their individual history and experiences with food and eating. That said, there are some key behaviours and beliefs toward food that can help with diagnosis and treatment, such as:

- Extreme selectivity in food choices
- Avoidance of certain textures or smells
- Limited variety in the diet
- Difficulty meeting nutritional needs
- Physical symptoms, including weight loss, nutritional deficiencies, and impaired growth in children

How does ARFID differ from other eating disorders?

ARFID stands apart from other eating disorders because the eating patterns are not driven by concerns about body image or weight. Unlike anorexia or bulimia, where individuals often have a fear of gaining weight or a distorted body image, ARFID primarily involves avoidance or restriction of certain foods due to sensory sensitivities, fear of choking or vomiting, or a lack of interest in eating.

Why does ARFID develop?

There is no 'one reason' for why ARFID develops, however, individuals tend to experience one of the following 3 types of ARFID, which provide an indication as to why the eating disorder developed in the first place:

- Sensory sensitivity
- Lack of interest in eating
- Fear of negative consequences

Individuals with sensory sensitivities may also have an Autism diagnosis. What's more, someone who fears negative consequences may have experienced a trauma or negative life experience (such as choking, or vomiting) and go on to develop a phobia.



“People with ARFID deserve compassion, kindness, and a paced approach to ensure that recovery is possible.”

Myths and stereotypes

People with ARFID are often mislabelled as ‘picky eaters’, and whilst both ARFID and picky eating involve selective eating behaviours, they are distinct conditions with differences in severity, underlying causes, and potential impacts on health.

For instance, whilst picky eating can cause frustration and mealtime conflicts, it generally does not significantly impact a person’s health or nutritional status. ARFID, however, is more severe and can significantly affect a person’s ability to meet their nutritional needs.

Unlike picky eating, ARFID is not solely driven by preferences or dislikes. It can involve fear, anxiety, or sensory issues related to food, and often involves psychological factors such as trauma related to food.

For many, living with ARFID often involves sticking to a limited selection of ‘safe’ foods while avoiding others due to anxiety, fear, or discomfort. This can significantly impact social interactions and relationships, making communal dining or family meals particularly challenging.

In addition to the social hurdles, individuals with ARFID may experience feelings of shame associated with their symptoms, especially if they have endured them for an extended period.

What does treatment look like?

Often, treatment for ARFID requires a multi-disciplinary approach that combines psychotherapy and sessions with a specialist dietitian who understands the illness and how it can manifest differently in different people.

At Orri, our comprehensive approach recognises that ARFID is a unique and complex diagnosis, requiring tailored interventions that address both the physical and psychological aspects of the eating disorder. Our team of dedicated professionals – including dietitians, psychotherapists, and occupational therapists – collaborate to create a supportive environment for individuals struggling with ARFID.

Treatment at Orri is centred around fostering a safe and nourishing relationship with food, gradually expanding the variety of accepted foods, and addressing underlying fears and anxieties, or sensory sensitivities.

Through a combination of dietetic and therapeutic support, we empower individuals with kindness and compassion to overcome the limitations imposed by ARFID and embrace a more balanced and fulfilling relationship with food.



You're not alone in this journey. Reaching out for help can provide you with the guidance and encouragement you need.

Remember that small steps forward are still progress, and every effort you make towards expanding your food choices and overcoming fears is a victory worth celebrating.

Be patient and compassionate with yourself throughout this process, and know that change is within your reach.

How can I help myself?

- Reach out for support, whether that's to a loved one or a healthcare professional
- Be kind to yourself as you navigate this journey. It may be that you've lived with ARFID for a long time, and the prospect of change or treatment might feel very overwhelming and uncertain

How can I help a loved one?

- Research the condition to inform yourself and challenge any myths and misconceptions
- Consider treatment options for your loved one
- Consider if you would benefit from support as well, such as one-to-one psychotherapy or family therapy
- Offer patience, kindness and compassion to your loved one, recognising that ARFID is often accompanied by emotional distress, and the behaviours can be an attempt to move away from fear and towards a sense of safety

Recovery is possible

Recovery from ARFID is possible. It's important to recognise that the journey toward recovery may involve ups and downs, but with determination, support, and the right resources, progress is possible.



Learn more about ARFID treatment with Orri.

www.orri-uk.com

0203 918 6340

You can expect respect, kindness and compassion,
every step of the way.

Disclaimer: This guide is for informational purposes only and should not replace professional medical advice or treatment. If you or someone you know may have ARFID, please consult a healthcare provider for proper assessment and guidance.