

Eating difficulties

What are eating difficulties?

Everyone Eats Differently!

We all have our own ways of eating! Some days you might eat a lot, and other days you might not feel very hungry. It's totally normal to switch between wanting to eat healthy foods and enjoying some treats!

Sometimes our feelings about food can make us feel anxious or stressed and some people may use eating as a way to cope with difficult situations or feelings. Below are some examples of signs and symptoms of difficulties with eating:

- Losing your appetite
- Obsessing about your body shape
- Being afraid of gaining weight
- Eating to cope with your feelings
- Feeling guilty for eating
- Feeling self-conscious when eating or not wanting to eat in front of others
- Strict control of what you can and can't eat

You might think you know what an eating difficulty looks like, but everyone gets different symptoms and your weight or appearance doesn't always define the problem. If you're struggling with any of these symptoms, speak to someone you trust or contact one of the services at the end of this leaflet.

One eating difficulty that often affects children and young people, especially those with mental health difficulties or neurodiverse traits, is ARFID (Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder).



PSYCHOEDUCATION

ARFID



What is ARFID?

ARFID, or Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder, is when someone has a hard time eating certain foods or trying new ones. Children and Young People with ARFID might only eat a few types of food because they feel scared or anxious about trying anything different. This can make mealtimes tricky and might mean they don't get all the nutrients their bodies need to grow strong and healthy. It's important to know that if you or someone you know feels this way about food, it's okay to ask for help.

Common signs of ARFID

- **Not Trying New Foods:** You might feel really scared or anxious about trying new foods, sticking to only a few favourites.
- **Eating Very Little:** Some children and young people with ARFID eat only a small amount of food each day, which can make them feel tired or weak.
- **Feeling Upset at Mealtimes:** You might feel really anxious, upset, or even sick when it's time to eat, especially if there are foods you don't like around.
- **Being Picky About Textures:** Some children and young people might only like certain textures, like crunchy or smooth, and may not want to eat foods that feel different.
- **Avoiding Certain Colors or Smells:** You might avoid foods because of their colours or smells, even if they taste good!
- **Anxiety or sensory overload:** Finding it difficult when eating new food or eating in new environments.

What and who can help with eating difficulties?

If you're having a hard time with food, it's okay! Here are some ways to feel better:

Talk to a Trusted Adult: Share how you feel with a parent, teacher, or other trusted adult. They can help!

Try New Foods Slowly: Start with small bites of new foods, and don't worry if it takes time.

Make Mealtimes Fun: Involve friends or family in cooking or choosing foods together!

Focus on Your Favourites: It's okay to eat your favourite foods, but try to mix in new ones when you can.

Practice Deep Breathing: If you feel anxious, take a few deep breaths to help calm down before eating.

Coping with other peoples opinions/comments: Not everyone around you may understand your eating difficulties and may comment on your body image, it might help to explain to family and friends how you feel. Describe to them what a more helpful or supportive response may be.

Take care online: Be aware of how you feel when you are online, it is okay to take a break from social media. Remember that many images have been changed to make the person look different, they may be filtered or photoshops.

Look for positive communities and resources around eating and body positivity. There are some services on the next page who can help with this.

Who can help:

The BEAT website is a safe place where children and young people can find help and support for eating problems, learn more about how to feel better, and connect with others who understand what they're going through. Information on support and how to access free online group support can be found on their website

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) helps children and young people who are having difficulties with food and their feelings about eating. They provide support from friendly professionals, like doctors and therapists, who understand eating challenges and work with you to feel better and develop healthier habits. This service works with young people up to the age of 18 who are experiencing significant eating difficulties. This service accepts self-referrals, for more information or to refer into the service contact via

Phone: 03000 132 000 option 7 or Email: TEWV.tcypceds@nhs.net

Young Minds is a UK charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

Kooth is an online free website which provides free, safe and anonymous mental health support for children and young people aged 11-18. It includes a safe online community, a range of self-help tools and live text-based chat sessions with a qualified mental health practitioner.

<https://www.kooth.com>

The Be Body Positive website and support for helping to build a positive relationship with food and your body. It has support for both young people and parents/carers.

<https://bebodypositive.org.uk>