How can families support young people with ARFID, particularly in relation to diet?

The first thing to say is not to be tied by diagnosis, or lack of. Diagnostic pathways are still few and far between and that's not ideal but it is the status quo. I don't think it's helpful for families to self-diagnose but it is important to say that all the resources and advice for supporting yourself or a loved one through ARFID apply to restrictive and selective eating presentations too. This is the case even if there isn't a diagnosis.

Therefore, I'd advise looking up all the available, credible advice and self-help support. Our website (**Support for Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) - Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust**) for individuals and families, is full of Information and resources. It includes the incredible work that the British Dietetic Association (BDA) ARFID sub-group has produced as well as resources you can share with schools. We also produced a bitesize webinar series for time-poor parents to watch. This is broken down into specific titles of interest to help you quickly find the advice you're looking for.

Lastly, we've linked so many other amazing places for support. These include PEACE, ARFID awareness UK, bebodypositive.org, Beat and many others. Put simply, reliable information is a great place to start.

SUPPORT STRATEGIES

It's hard to discuss all of the strategies that could be helpful because it's going to depend on your own circumstance, your child and their unique differences and difficulties but a few consistencies in the advice includes:

- Listening to your childs experiences
- Taking a low pressure approach
- Being led by their pace
- Understanding that change takes a long time
- Not limiting any safe foods
- Supporting a low stimulant environment
- Supporting their regulation strategies in a judgment free way

For parents, I'd also advise trying to avoid generic messages about food and eating. Typically these include healthy eating messages that say (for example) that family meals should be eaten together at a table or that screens shouldn't be used during mealtimes. Typically, health messages also tell us that processed foods are 'bad' and should be minimised. There are many examples like those. Parents and carers should be assurred that when we are talking about helpful ARFID care, none of these generic messages apply. In the least, they certainly aren't helpful. Instead of helping to improve the childs' eating, these social rules and messages tend only to add pressure and guilt for parents who are trying their very best in really difficult circumstances. What helps society ('most people') is not the same as 'all people'.

Above all else – parents know their child best. They are the expert on their child. So they, and their young person, will know the things that work better and the things that don't. They'll also know when to be worried or if things are deteriorating.

If parents and carers are concerned about the health, growth and development of their child, they should visit their local GP (or health visitor). They will be able to offer advice and signposting to the appropriate local service(s) in your area. If there is a sudden and rapid restriction in food or fluids that has led to sudden deterioration in physical health parents and carers should seek help quickly. This may include contacting NHS-111 or emergency care services. If there is a sudden deterioration in mental health, or you are concerned about mental health risks, please contact your local crisis or emergency care services. If you wish to contact a non-emergency helpline you can do so via the BEAT Helpline on: 0808 801 0677 Available Monday-Friday 9am-8pm, and weekends 4-8pm.

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Spotify Episode with Clare: Here