

students with ARFID (avoidant/ restrictive food intake disorder)

What is ARFID (avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder)?

Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) is characterized by the avoidance or restriction of food intake. Students with ARFID often have clinically significant failure to meet nutritional needs or insufficient oral energy intake. To meet diagnostic criteria, at least one of the following must be present:

- Significant weight loss
- Nutritional deficiency or related health complications
- Dependence on enteral feeding or oral nutritional supplements
- Noticeable interference with psychosocial functioning
- ARFID is **not** caused by concerns about body weight or shape, nor is it explained by other medical or mental health conditions.

Types of ARFID

Sensory-Based Food Aversions

- Persistent refusal to eat foods with specific tastes, textures, temperatures, or smells for at least one month
- Food refusal often begins when a new or different food is introduced
- After an aversive reaction, the child may refuse similar foods based on appearance or smell
- Eats preferred foods without issue
- May show dietary deficiencies without growth delays
- Not caused by trauma, food allergies, or medical illness
- Typically begins in early childhood and may continue into adulthood

ARFID with a Comorbid Medical Condition

- Associated with a concurrent medical issue
- Food refusal or inadequate intake lasting at least two weeks
- Can begin at any age and may fluctuate
- Starts feeding but becomes distressed and stops
- Medical condition contributes to feeding distress
- May result in weight loss or failure to gain weight
- Medical treatment may help but not fully resolve the feeding issue

General Food Aversion

- Refusal to eat adequate amounts of food for at least one month
- Typically begins between 6 months and 3 years of age and may persist
- Child rarely expresses hunger or interest in eating
- Prefers activities like playing or talking over eating
- Shows significant growth delays
- Not linked to trauma, allergies, or medical illness

How can ARFID affect a student at school?

Posttraumatic Feeding Disorder

- Sudden and severe refusal to eat
- Triggered by traumatic events or repeated trauma to the throat or digestive tract
- Refusal may appear in various forms depending on the child's experience
- Can occur at any age

Common School Challenges

Students with eating disorders often strive for high achievement but may experience:

- Difficulty concentrating and focusing
- Reduced performance in sports
- Physical symptoms such as nausea, headaches, dizziness, and fatigue
- Lower ability to complete tasks compared to peers

How can schools support students with ARFID?

Academic

- Refer student for academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Assign a **manageable workload** focused on **quality over quantity** as need.
- Allow **flexible deadlines** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.
- Adjust schedules to avoid missing **core subjects** due to medical appointments.
- Provide **staff training** and share relevant information about the condition.
- Maintain **consistent communication** with families to monitor progress and adjust support (emails, progress notes, conferences).

Social and Emotional

- Meet with the student and family before the student **returns to school**.
- Recognize the student's **need for perfection** and **provide reassurance**.
- Support the student in **reconnecting with peers**.
- Ensure the student has access to a **trusted adult for support**.

Physical

- Excuse the student from **physical education** if necessary.
- Provide **supervised lunches** and **monitor snacks**.
- Monitor for **medication side effects** (e.g., drowsiness).
- Allow **elevator access** if stairs pose a safety risk.
- Provide **two sets of textbooks** (home and school) to reduce fatigue.

Treatment at Children's Health

Eating disorders can become chronic, severe, and even life-threatening if not treated properly. The Center for Pediatric Eating Disorders at Children's Health is the only facility in Texas and the surrounding region offering a full range of specialized services for children and adolescents. With over 20 years of experience, the center provides expert care from highly trained clinicians. For more information, call **214-456-8899**.

SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit [childrens.com/school-services](https://www.childrens.com/school-services)

