



# ARC Young Adult Mental Health Information Series

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## Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)

ARFID is an eating disorder that involves intense restrictions on the amount of food and types of foods you eat. Unlike other eating disorders, people with ARFID aren't worried about their body image, shape, or size but instead that the food they consume will make them ill. A person with ARFID does not consume enough calories to grow and develop properly. ARFID can also result in problems at school or work, due to difficulties eating with others and extended times needed to eat. ARFID is more than just fussy eating and affects 1-3% of children and teens.



### Symptoms

#### Psychological/Behavioural

- Dramatic weight loss.
- Reports constipation, abdominal pain, cold intolerance, lethargy, and/or excess energy.
- Reports consistent, vague gastrointestinal issues around mealtimes that have no known cause.
- Dramatic restriction in types or amount of food eaten.
- Will only eat certain textures of food.
- Fears of choking or vomiting.
- Lack of appetite or interest in food.
- Limited range of preferred foods that becomes narrower over time (i.e., picky eating that progressively worsens).
- No body image disturbance or fear of weight gain.

#### Physical

- Abnormal laboratory findings (anemia, low thyroid and hormone levels, low potassium, low blood cell counts, slow heart rate).
- Post-puberty female loses menstrual period.
- Dizziness.
- Fainting/syncope.
- Feeling cold all the time.
- Sleep problems.
- Dry and brittle nails.
- Fine hair on body (lanugo).
- Thinning of hair on head.
- Muscle weakness.
- Cold, mottled hands and feet or swelling of feet.
- Poor wound healing.
- Impaired immune functioning.





## Causes and Risk Factors

Three possible causes include genetic factors, a traumatic incident and restrictive eating. Researchers say that several genes could play a role in the development of eating disorders like ARFID. Those same genes could increase the risk of mental health issues like anxiety disorders. A sudden food aversion could stem from a frightening, food-related problem, such as choking, bloating, diarrhea, gastrointestinal pain, and food poisoning. A link has also been noted between undiagnosed ARFID and people limiting their meals due to celiac disease.

Risk factors for ARFID involve a range of biological, psychological, and sociocultural issues

- People with autism spectrum conditions are much more likely to develop ARFID, as are those with ADHD and intellectual disabilities.
- Children who don't outgrow normal picky eating, or in whom picky eating is severe, appear to be more likely to develop ARFID.
- Many children with ARFID also have a co-occurring anxiety disorder, and they are also at high risk for other psychiatric disorders.

## Treatment

Treatment involves a combination of medication to restore the body to health and improve mental health as well as therapy. These medications can be anti-psychotic medications, antidepressants or medications that stimulate your appetite. Cognitive behavioural therapy is most commonly used and will help you:

- Recognize problematic thoughts and behaviours that affect your health.
- Feel less fear or anxiety around food.
- Be more comfortable with sensory challenges.
- Other therapies include family therapy and group therapy.

## Resources available

Aire Ouverte for youth 12-25 years of age. 5811 Taschereau Blvd., local 30, Brossard, QC J4Z 1A5  
Drop-in services: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 1:00-8:00 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. By appointment from Monday to Friday. (450) 445-4474

Sööma Pointe-Claire – (514) 437-4260, [www.sooma.ca](http://www.sooma.ca)

BACA clinic – (514) 544-2323, [cliniquebaca.com/en](http://cliniquebaca.com/en)

Clinique des troubles de l'alimentation – 640 Dorchester St., suite 205,  
Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, QC J3B 5A4, (450) 800-6181

Psychosocial support available at your local CLSC and through your primary care physician.

CLSC St-Hubert (450) 443-7400

CLSC Brossard (450) 445-4452

CLSC St-Jean-sur-Richelieu (450) 358-2572

CLSC Richelieu (450) 658-7561

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