Understanding ARFID (Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) Buckinghamshire Local Area Position September 2026.

This document explains what ARFID is and where children, young people and families in Buckinghamshire may be able to get support. It has been developed jointly by professionals from health services to help provide consistent information for families

What is ARFID?

ARFID (Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) is an eating disorder where someone struggles to eat enough food or a wide enough variety of foods. This may be because they:

- are very sensitive to the taste, texture, smell, appearance or temperature of food
- have little interest in eating or food
- are worried about eating because of fears such as choking, vomiting or pain
- have had a difficult or traumatic experience related to eating.

ARFID is different from anorexia nervosa because it is **not linked to concerns about weight, shape or wanting to lose weight**.

ARFID is also more than being a "picky eater". Many children go through phases of selective eating. ARFID is usually considered when eating difficulties have a significant impact on a child's health, growth, nutrition, emotional wellbeing or everyday life.

It is not necessarily the type of foods a child eats that indicates ARFID. What matters most is the impact the eating difficulties are having on their health, wellbeing and daily life.

ARFID can affect children, young people and adults of any age and body size, but it is more common in people who have:

- autism
- ADHD
- learning disabilities
- anxiety disorders
- some medical conditions, particularly those affecting the digestive system.

Having one of these conditions does not mean someone will develop ARFID, but they may be at increased risk.

Who might help?

Most families' journey will start with a conversation with their GP or other professional such as a mental health lead in school. The right support depends on what is causing the eating difficulties and their impact.

Children and young people with ARFID may need support from different services, including medical or mental health professionals, dietitians, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists.

What support is available in Buckinghamshire?

The support a child receives will depend on the reasons for their eating difficulties and the impact these are having.

ARFID often requires support from more than one professional. There is currently no single ARFID pathway in Buckinghamshire, but several services may be able to help. Some services will take a referral from a parent or the young person themselves; others require a professional referral. The services listed below have information on their website as to how to contact them yourself or be referred.

Nutrition and Dietetics, (Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust)

Dietitians support children and young people whose nutrition, growth or weight may be affected by their eating difficulties. They can:

- assess nutritional needs
- provide advice about improving nutrition
- recommend nutritional supplements where needed
- work alongside other professionals supporting the child.

Referrals are usually made by a healthcare professional.

Speech and Language Therapy, (Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust)

Some children experience difficulties with chewing, swallowing or feeding skills.

Speech and Language Therapists can:

- assess eating and drinking skills
- assess swallowing safety
- advise on food and drink textures
- support the development of feeding and chewing skills
- work with other professionals when needed.

Occupational Therapy – (Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust)

Occupational Therapists can support children whose eating difficulties are related to sensory processing differences.

They can help families understand:

- sensory sensitivities linked to food
- strategies to reduce stress around eating
- ways to support children to gradually explore new foods
- self-regulation and coping strategies

Picky eating, also known as fussy, faddy or choosy eating, is usually classified as part of a spectrum of feeding difficulties. You may notice an unwillingness to eat familiar foods or to try new foods, as well as strong food preferences. The consequences may include poor dietary variety during early childhood.

The service has provided online information, advice and webinars on **Picky eating and sensory challenges**

A referral is not required to access advice and support from the Children's Therapy Services.

Community Paediatrics – (Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust)
Referrals to community paediatricians are often initiated by paediatric dieticians or therapists.

Some children with restricted eating benefit from input from community paediatricians to exclude medical causes. This might include considering gastro-intestinal conditions, dental/ oro-motor, food allergies or any other medical causes of restricted intake.

They will then arrange appropriate investigations rather than extensive blanket testing. Working with dietetic colleagues they would look for any faltering growth and consider nutritional supplementation in severely affected children.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) - (Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust)
Some children and young people with ARFID may need support from CAMHS if their eating difficulties are linked to significant anxiety, such as a fear of eating, choking, vomiting or a past traumatic experience.

CAMHS is usually involved when:

- difficulties have continued for several months and are significant affecting function. For example, everyday life, education, relationships and/or physical health
- anxiety or trauma is a significant driver of the restrictive eating
- a mental health intervention addressing underlying anxiety or trauma is likely to be beneficial

CAMHS provides evidence-based treatments (including psychological therapy and/or medication) to help reduce the anxiety that may be driving the eating difficulties. CAMHS focuses on the mental health aspects of ARFID and does not usually lead on medical, nutritional, sensory or swallowing needs. Some children will require co-ordinated intervention from multiple services to meet their needs.

Most children are seen as outpatients, although some may need hospital admission if there are significant concerns about their physical health.

Further Information and Resources

ARFID Awareness UK are dedicated to raising awareness and furthering information about ARFID. A not-for-profit organisation, they work to provide information for individuals, parents, carers and medical professionals: https://www.arfidawarenessuk.org/

BEAT, the UK's eating disorder charity, have a specific page on their website relating to ARFID: https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/about-eating-disorders/types/arfid/

The Association of British Dietitians (BDA) have information about ARFID on their website: https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/arfid-help-my-child-wont-eat.html

Buckinghamshire Occupational Therapy (Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust) offer free webinars to parents, including a webinar on Supporting Sensory Eating and Drinking Needs: https://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/cyp/therapy/occupational-therapy/webinars-courses-and-workshops/

They also offer Occupational Therapy virtual advice sessions and advice lines, to ensure that parents, carers and those working in educational settings receive Occupational Therapy advice when it is needed: https://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/cyp/therapy/occupational-therapy/occupational-therapy-virtual-advice-sessions/

National Autistic Society (NAS) are the UK's leading charity for people on the autism spectrum and their families. If your child has Autism and avoidant eating the link below from NAS may be helpful: https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/avoidant-eating

"ARFID Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder – A Guide for Parents and Carers" by Rachel Bryant-Waugh.
Primarily written for parents and carers of young people, a wealth of practical tips and suggested strategies to support parents and carers to take positive steps towards dealing with ARFID presentations.

The Walking With You Group| Oxford Health CAMHS is a parent support group, run by CAMHS but is open to all. It is a safe space where you can talk freely among people who are walking the same path as you. There is no judgment, and it is completely confidential. The group is open to anyone who is supporting a child or young person experiencing mental health difficulties, up to the age of 25.

The Maudsley Centre for Child and Adolescent Eating Disorders have resources and information available **Bodywhys New Maudsley Carer Skills Podcast Season 2** has a range of informative podcasts

ARFID – Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (Mini-series part 1)
ARFID – Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder in children (Mini-series part 2)
ARFID – Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder in adults (Mini-series part 3)
ARFID – What to do when your loved one is stuck (Mini-series part 4)
ARFID – Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder: Fear of aversive consequences (Mini-series part 5)