



Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder

This Family Education Sheet explains what to expect when your child is in the hospital for Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID). ARFID is a feeding disorder that occurs when a child does not eat enough to meet their energy or nutritional needs. A child could be avoiding eating for a variety of reasons, such as not feeling well when eating.

Why does my child need to be in the hospital for treatment?

We are concerned about your child's eating behaviors and their risk of malnutrition (when the body does not get enough nutrients). Our goal during this hospital stay is to help your child with their feeding challenges and to improve their quality of life.

Who will treat my child?

Your child will have many kinds of treatment to change their eating patterns. The care team may include:

- Medical doctors and nurses
- Nutritionists
- Psychiatrists and Psychologists
- Social workers
- Feeding specialists and child life specialists

What happens while my child is in the hospital?

We will help you and your child to face food-related fears and create healthier feeding behaviors and routines. This hospital stay requires you and your child to do challenging work.

- **We will work with you to create an eating plan for your child.** On the first day of your stay, our goal is to help your child eat 3 meals, each lasting 20-30 minutes. Your child cannot eat snacks or other food between meals.
- **We will observe your child eating their meal in an environment both with the caregiver and without the caregiver** to understand your child's feeding behaviors better.
- **Your child's physical activity may be limited due to their medical state** (for example, they may feel weak or dizzy due to lack of nutrients from not eating). We may recommend bed rest or using a wheelchair.
- **Sometimes a child may require a feeding tube to make progress in feeding and nutrition.** Your medical team will discuss feeding tube placement if it appears needed.

How do you help my child change their behavior?

Members of our team will work closely with you and your child to use behavioral approaches to:

- **Reward feeding progress** (for example: eating by mouth, eating more, eating new foods). Examples for rewards may include:
 - Arts and crafts activities
 - Phone/internet
 - Small toys
 - Special time visiting with family members
 - Stickers
 - TV/screen time
- **Improve poor feeding habits** (for example: refusing certain foods, grazing on food all day, lack of meal schedule). Examples of ways to change these habits may include:
 - Creating a daily schedule
 - Making privileges/preferred activities based on the ability to eat
 - Limiting visitors

Social workers will work with caregivers to provide supportive counseling throughout your child's hospital stay.

Should friends and family visit?

Visitors can make it harder for your child to focus on changing their food-related fears or poor feeding habits. We may recommend limiting visits from family and friends.

For more information

We are always here to help you and your child during your stay. Please contact your nurse or a member of your care team with questions or if you need more information.

This Family Education Sheet is available in [Arabic](#) and [Spanish](#).