

Supporting your child to try new foods

For children with Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) and neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g., autism, cerebral palsy, global developmental delay), trying new foods can be scary.

It may seem like they are being difficult or just want to eat their favourite foods, but for most kids with ARFID their reaction to new or different foods is based on fear. There may not be any danger involved with trying a new food, however children with ARFID react to new foods as if it may hurt them.

Once you can look at ARFID through a different lens, supporting this group of children may look different than advice commonly given for picky eating. Children with ARFID can't always communicate why they are nervous to try new foods. Hunger is not usually enough of a motivator to try new foods.

Here are some key things to consider when addressing your child's feeding challenges with their care team.



Nutrition and hydration comes first

When setting a goal of expanding food variety, it is important to first ensure that your child:

- ✓ Meets necessary nutrition needs (calories, protein, vitamins, minerals) from food and supplements
- ✓ Drinks enough fluids
- ✓ Has any nutrient deficiencies addressed

Your care team should prioritize these first before considering trying new foods.

Consider anxiety

When children have difficulty trying new foods it often comes from fear of new and unknown things.

The goal is to try

Often families want their children to love food or enjoy eating. However we cannot make a child like a new food. The goal is to help the child to try new foods in hopes of finding something that they like or can tolerate.

Explore food with purpose

Families are often told to let their child play with food, however, it is important to have goals. Purposeful food play may include:



- Building new skills (e.g., using a spoon or a cup)
- Incorporating your child in food preparation (e.g., stirring, scooping, pouring)
- Involving your child in grocery shopping (e.g., choosing and putting away foods)
- Promoting your child's food vocabulary (e.g., discuss food textures, taste, smell)

Avoid tricking

Children are often particular about brands and prefer fast food because these are predictable. People may think that they can trick children into trying new foods. For example, by placing homemade chicken nuggets or fries into their favourite fast food box, or putting milk into a yogurt drink container. However, children **DO** notice and then may not trust foods that they previously trusted.



Establish routines



When a child is only eating a few types of food, families may be happy for them to eat anything. They may snack on preferred foods all day, making it difficult to implement a mealtime routine or introduce new foods. It is important to begin to implement a routine where favourite foods are offered at scheduled eating times rather than available all day.

For more information about creating routines visit our website to view other handouts.



This handout is part of the NDD Restrictive Eating Clinic Information Series:
www.hollandbloorview.ca/RestrictiveEatingInfo