



FEEDING AND EATING DISORDERS

AVOIDANT/RESTRICTIVE FOOD INTAKE DISORDER

What it is:

Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder is an eating or feeding disturbance in which an individual either avoids eating, or restricts their eating to such a degree that appropriate nutritional and/or energy needs are not met. The individual can either have a lack of interest in eating food, or avoid eating certain foods based on the sensory characteristics of the food. This behaviour can occur in both infants/children as well as adults. One or more of the following aspects must be present for a diagnosis of the disorder to be made: significant weight loss or inability to meet required weight gain, significant nutritional deficiency, and a dependence on enteral feeding or oral nutritional supplements. The lack of proper nutrients should also result in interference with psychological functioning.

Food avoidance or restriction commonly develops in infancy or early childhood, and it may persist into adulthood. It should also be noted that avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder does not focus on restricting diet in an attempt to lose weight or control body shape. If these symptoms are present, the diagnosis is more likely anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. Other medical ailments that could cause the disturbance in appetite should also be eliminated when considering a diagnosis.

Common Symptoms:

1. A lack of interest in eating food
2. An avoidance of certain foods because of the sensory characteristics of the food, for example its texture, smell or taste
3. Significant weight loss, or in infants/children an inability to make expected weight gain or physical growth in line with developmental goals
4. Significant nutritional deficiency
5. Dependence on enteral feeding, such as tube feeding, or nutritional supplements
6. Impairment in psychological functioning



**SA Federation for
Mental Health**

Causes:

There are a number of factors that could contribute to the development of avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder. Individuals with anxiety disorders, autism spectrum disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder may be at greater risk of developing the disorder. Family anxiety, and being raised by a mother who has an eating disorder may also increase a child's risk of developing the disorder. A history of gastrointestinal conditions, gastroesophageal reflux disease, and vomiting, has also been associated with the disorder and its symptoms.

Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*