

Nationally Recognized Care for Children and Teens with Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)

What Is ARFID?

Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) often begins in early childhood when a child shows a strong preference for a narrow range of foods and avoids eating any other foods.

This “picky eating” behavior may be based upon a general lack of interest in food; sensory issues associated with food such as taste, texture or smell; fear of choking or vomiting; or because of medical complications. ARFID differs from traditional eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, which are often related to distorted body image and a desire to be thin.

Children and teens with ARFID may show signs of substantial weight loss or failure to achieve expected weight and height gain, significant nutritional deficiency, dependence upon nutritional supplements or difficulties engaging in daily activities due to anxiety about food. A thorough assessment is necessary, including a complete physical and psychological history, and if necessary, evaluations by an occupational therapist, speech therapist or gastroenterologist. The goals of treatment are to increase the variety and quantity of preferred foods to ensure nutritional needs are met and to decrease anxiety in order to participate fully in daily activities.



The ARFID Program at Children’s HealthSM Medical Center

At the center for pediatric eating disorders at Children’s Medical Center Plano, we have developed an evidence-based program specifically for children and teens who have been diagnosed with ARFID:

- Most ARFID patients complete four weeks of treatment at the Partial Hospital level of care
- Treatment is five days per week, Monday-Friday from 8:45 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Individual and group therapy is provided for children and teens
- Music, art and recreational therapy is provided each week for children and teens
- School is provided two hours per day
- Children and teens bring lunch and snacks that include preferred foods and challenge foods
- Parents participate in a multi-family group and a parent skills group daily
- Parents participate in family therapy one hour per week

Treatment Team

Care and support for patients are provided by a multidisciplinary team of experts in pediatric eating disorders.

These include:

- Psychiatrists
- Psychologists
- Dietitians
- Teachers
- Nurses
- Milieu Therapists
- Individual and Family Therapists
- Art, Recreational and Music Therapists

Family-Centered Continuum of Care

Eating disorders are complex diseases that involve the entire family. A family-centered approach is at the core of our program, which follows the American Psychiatric Association guidelines for the treatment of pediatric eating disorders. This family-based approach is centered in the knowledge that family participation is essential in helping the child attain the greatest benefit from treatment, and it works to facilitate a successful transition to home and school after treatment.

ARFID Program Goals and Results

- The overarching goals of the ARFID program are to increase the variety and the volume of foods eaten. These goals are accomplished by providing each child with his or her preferred foods, while gradually increasing exposure to new foods, usually one bite at a time. The program begins the process of the introduction of new foods. Behavior plans, motivators and the development of coping skills are used to encourage children to try new foods.
- Typical results show that children can be successful when they begin the process of trying new foods, and during treatment they show decreased anxiety around foods. Results show a significant decrease in behavioral pediatric feeding issues from admission to discharge, such as delayed eating, spitting out food or crying at feeding time. In 2019, patients in the program had an 18% decrease in feeding issues, as reported by parents.
- Families complete the program with strategies for how to continue their progress at home after discharge toward the goal of more normalized eating. Parents have daily involvement in treatment and parents learn skills so they can continue to progress at home. Parents also report increased confidence in overall parenting and handling their child's meal plan.

Our Physicians



Urszula Kelley, M.D.

Chief of Service for Psychiatry at Children's Medical Center Plano

Dr. Urszula Kelley has over 20 years of experience treating patients with eating disorders and has worked in the Center for Pediatric Eating Disorders at Children's Health since 2011. Dr. Kelley attended medical school in her native country of Poland at Jagiellonian University Collegium Medicum in Krakow and completed both her General Psychiatry Residency and her Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellowship at UT Southwestern. Dr. Kelley is board-certified in General Psychiatry and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. She is a Certified Eating Disorders Specialist and an Approved Supervisor for eating disorders professionals through the International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals. Dr. Kelley is a Professor of Psychiatry at UT Southwestern.



Briana Sacco, M.D.

Medical Director for the Center for Pediatric Eating Disorders

Dr. Briana Sacco received her Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston and was Chief Resident in the Triple Board Residency Program at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. The Triple Board Residency program consisted of training in Pediatrics, General Psychiatry and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, which provided Dr. Sacco with expertise in all areas of child and adolescent health, behavior and development. She is board-certified in General Psychiatry and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Dr. Sacco is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at UT Southwestern, and she oversees the ARFID program.



LanChasica (Lanie) Alexander, APRN, MSN, RN

Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Center for Pediatric Eating Disorders

LanChasica (Lanie) Alexander, APRN, MSN, RN is board certified as a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner through the American Nurses Credentialing Center. She gained extensive experience in treating eating disorders during the 4 years she worked as a Registered Nurse in the Center for Pediatric Eating Disorders at Children's Health. Following her board certification as an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, Lanie assumed increased clinical responsibilities as one of our medical providers. She completed her undergraduate degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and received her Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Texas at Arlington.

Appointment Scheduling

Please contact us at 214-456-8899, Option 3.

For more information, visit us at childrens.com/eatingdisorders.