# Growing awareness of avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder among parents



A significant surge in cases of avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) has prompted increased awareness among parents, as demonstrated by the experiences of two individuals, Tallulah Dent and Amy Doyle, both of whom have faced severe dietary restrictions due to this eating disorder.

Twelve-year-old Tallulah Dent, from Stafford, Staffordshire, was diagnosed with ARFID in 2024 after a distressing incident at a restaurant left her in tears. Her mother, Gemma, 42, initially thought her daughter was simply being 'fussy' about food, closely associating eating disorders with anorexia or bulimia. The condition, which has seen a fivefold increase in reported cases since 2018, as highlighted by Beat Eating Disorders, required Gemma to delve deeper into understanding her daughter’s behaviours.

From the age of four, Tallulah’s diet revolved primarily around Yorkshire puddings, with occasional consumption of ham sandwiches or cheese pizza; however, trying anything new often prompted feelings of nausea or distress. Following a particularly challenging dining experience at the age of 11, Tallulah pleaded with her mother to seek medical assistance, indicating that her struggles with food went beyond mere pickiness.

Gemma subsequently consulted cognitive behavioural hypnotherapist David Kilmurry, from whom Tallulah received 12 sessions of treatment. Since her diagnosis, Tallulah has made considerable progress, expanding her food repertoire to include items such as peppers, noodles, and eggs. Gemma noted that being open about her daughter's eating disorder has helped mitigate feelings of judgement from others: “I remember we went out to Wetherspoons with friends, and Tallulah wanted chicken nuggets… I went to the bar in such a panic,” she recounted. “Since then, I’ve found that being honest is the best way to go.”

Meanwhile, in Essex, 30-year-old Amy Doyle faced a personal crisis after being mistakenly diagnosed with cancer and diabetes, leading her to develop orthorexia and ARFID. Reduced to a weight of just five stone, Amy found herself unable to consume a broad range of foods without intense fear, experiencing panic when confronted with anything outside her limited diet of plain chicken, vegetables, and pasta.

Faced with the threat of being detained under the Mental Health Act due to her precarious health condition, Amy sought help online and discovered Dr Kilmurry, who became instrumental in her recovery. After just one session with him in August 2024, she was able to eat sausage and mash—signifying a major step in her journey towards a more balanced diet.

Describing her past struggles, Amy recounted how her attempts to comply with dietary restrictions exacerbated her food fears, ultimately leading to significant weight loss. After starting treatment, she began to embrace foods she had long considered 'fear foods', such as burgers and fries, dubbing them her ‘medicine’ for health.

Dr Kilmurry emphasised the importance of clear diagnosis, particularly as ARFID and orthorexia are frequently misdiagnosed as anorexia, despite patients having no body image issues. He noted the rarity of working with lower-nutrition meals to facilitate recovery, reflecting the empathy and tailored support required for those with eating disorders.

Both Tallulah and Amy's experiences highlight the complexities of eating disorders and the critical nature of accurate diagnosis and appropriate support systems. As awareness grows, parents and individuals alike are encouraged to seek the help needed to navigate these challenging conditions.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39609023/> - This study provides insights into the incidence of ARFID in children and adolescents, highlighting its prevalence and common comorbidities like anxiety and autism spectrum disorder. It supports the growing awareness and need for accurate diagnosis of ARFID.
* <https://nedc.com.au/eating-disorders/types/arfid> - This resource explains the characteristics and complications of ARFID, including its distinction from other eating disorders like anorexia. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing ARFID as a serious condition that affects individuals of all ages.
* <https://media.market.us/eating-disorder-statistics/> - This report provides statistics on eating disorders, including ARFID, highlighting its prevalence and common symptoms such as selective eating and gastrointestinal issues. It underscores the need for awareness and proper treatment.
* <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/> - Beat Eating Disorders is a UK charity that provides support and resources for individuals with eating disorders, including ARFID. Their work contributes to the increased awareness and understanding of these conditions.
* <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/eating-problems/avoidant-restrictive-food-intake-disorder-arfid/> - This resource offers detailed information on ARFID, its symptoms, and the importance of seeking professional help. It supports the narrative of individuals like Tallulah and Amy who have benefited from proper diagnosis and treatment.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/avoidant-restrictive-food-intake-disorder-arfid/> - The NHS provides guidance on ARFID, including its diagnosis and treatment options. This information is crucial for parents and individuals seeking to understand and manage the condition effectively.
* <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/i-thought-daughter-naughty-disorder-31231471> - Please view link - unable to able to access data