

Picky children might have eating disorders

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It is not uncommon for young kids to be quite picky and reluctant to try new foods. Some of them can have eating disorders.

Many youngsters refuse to eat anything but their favourite foods.

One week they might be living on nothing but sausages, the next it might be plain white bread.

This of course is upsetting for parents. However, there is some solace in the knowledge that most kids grow out of being so fussy about food as they approach school age.

But for some children this can be something more serious called avoidant restrictive food intake (ARFID).

Bring on the carbs

Children with this diagnosis often eat just 10-15 food types, often all with the same colour and consistency, or meals from the same basic food group.

Usually these children only want to eat carbohydrates, like bread, potatoes, rice or pasta.

Eating such unbalanced meals poses a serious health hazard because the child is not getting essential nutrients.

Nobody has come up with a sure cause of this eating disorder.

Heightened sensitivity to smell and taste?

A pertinent factor could be an elevated sensitivity to smells, tastes and food consistencies. This could be genetic, according to Ulf Wallin, a chief physician in child psychiatry and an advisor at Lund University in Sweden.

It is not uncommon for the difficulties to start in a child's first year.

In addition to nutritional deficiencies, the social consequences can be quite troubling. Just picture the child who refuses to eat anything served at birthday parties or in family get-togethers.

“This diagnosis is only issued when the eating problem leads to obvious nutritional and energy deficiencies, or psychosocial problems,” stresses Wallin to ScienceNordic's partner forskning.se.

He is also a research and development leader at the Competence Centre for Eating Disorders in Sweden's Skåne Region.

Gender equality

According to a study conducted in Switzerland, three percent of all children have the ARFID diagnosis and boys and girls are equally represented.

Avoidant restrictive food intake disorder was registered in 2013 as a mental disorder in the manual issued by the American Psychiatric Association.

The diagnosis is so new that no extensive research has been conducted on methods of successful treatment.

The children who have ARFID seem often to have various anxiety disorders and some have conditions within the framework of an autism diagnosis, according to Wallin.

He says some might develop an anorexia condition because of long-term hunger and they should receive treatment accordingly.

Critical of the diagnosis

Per Johansson, a lecturer in clinical psychology at Lund University, is sceptical about diagnosing this selective eating disorder.

“Nearly all children eat selectively for a while,” he says to forskning.se.

As most kids grow out of being so finicky, he doesn't see the acute need for seeking professional help for this eating disorder.

He thinks a focus on the behaviour as a disease can be problematic.

“Selective eating is not a problem until it has persisted for a long time and if the child reduces the number of foods he or she eats. But for most kids this is a passing phase,” he asserts.

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 [Children often refuse to eat particular foods, like vegetables and fish. They might be more than finicky ? some could have eating disorders. \(Photo: Shutterstock/NTB/Scanpix\)](#) [6]

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