

Unraveling the Gut: A Case of Adult-Onset Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder Related To Chronic GI Issues

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Received: 12/4/2024

Accepted: 12/18/2024

Published: 10/15/2025

Background: Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) was introduced as a standalone diagnosis in the DSM-V in 2013, adapted from the previous “feeding disorder of infancy or early childhood.” While ARFID encompasses all ages, the literature predominantly focuses on pediatric presentations. Adult-onset ARFID, especially in medically complex patients with both sensory aversion and fear of gastrointestinal upset, remains poorly characterized. This case highlights a rare presentation of ARFID in an adult related to chronic gastrointestinal issues and surgeries, with unique challenges in acute medical management.

Case Presentation: We report a case of a 41-year-old female with adult-onset ARFID following a history of extensive gastrointestinal surgeries and radiation therapy for retroperitoneal sarcoma. She presented with severe electrolyte abnormalities after several days of hyperemesis. Management was complicated by her refusal of sodium tablets due to sensory aversions and a belief that her body improperly metabolized sodium. Additionally, surreptitious laxative use during admission, facilitated through family and food delivery services, further hindered treatment.

Conclusions: This case underscores the challenges of managing adult-onset ARFID in the context of complex medical and psychosocial factors. The interplay of sensory disturbances, fear of gastrointestinal pain, and suspected surreptitious behaviors created unique barriers to care. The insights gained from this case contribute to a growing understanding of ARFID in adults and emphasize the need for tailored approaches to both medical stabilization and long-term management in similar patients.

Keywords: Eating Disorders, ARFID
