The Emily Program Delivers Specialized Care for Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) in Atlanta

What may have been previously written off as picky eating, ARFID is a serious eating disorder requiring specialized treatment

Feb 5, 2025 - Atlanta, Ga. – The Emily Program, a national leader in eating disorder specialty care and behavioral health services, today announced the delivery of newly enhanced specialized eating disorder treatment services in Atlanta for individuals struggling with Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), an often misunderstood but serious condition affecting people of all ages.

ARFID is a lesser-known condition that has recently been gaining more awareness among healthcare professionals and the general population, resulting in a need for more specialized treatment resources for those with the condition. The Emily Program enhanced specialized ARFID intervention fills an identified gap in care as many providers of eating disorder care are not able to adequately address ARFID.

ARFID is characterized by an avoidance or aversion to food and eating that can lead to serious physical and social consequences. More than "picky eating," ARFID is a mental health condition and not just about food preference. It impacts about 3 percent of children and adults. Unlike other eating disorders, ARFID is not related to weight or body image. While it can be a standalone mental health condition, it commonly co-occurs in individuals diagnosed with autism, anxiety, and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

The Emily Program's ARFID treatment approach is rooted in both clinical expertise and compassion, offering treatment interventions tailored to each individual's unique needs. ARFID treatment, while in constant development, is aimed at reducing patients' distress and elevating quality of life while gradually broadening tolerance through exposure to new foods and related situations.

"ARFID can present as avoidance of certain tastes or textures, fear of adverse consequences, or a general lack of hunger or interest in eating. Those suffering often fail to meet nutritional needs and experience significant health and psychological challenges," said Taylor Rae Homesley, Executive Director, The Emily Program, Atlanta. "The Emily Program's ARFID treatment services provide compassionate, patient-centered care that empowers patients, reduces food distress, and addresses the unique sensory, psychological, and medical aspects of this disorder."

"Our goal is to provide holistic, accessible care that meets patients where they are," said Jonathan Levy, MD, CEDS-S, Medical Director and Director of Psychiatric Services for The Emily Program's Atlanta Eating Disorder Treatment Center for Children, Adolescents, and Adults. "ARFID is complex, but recovery is possible with the right treatment and support."

Specialized Treatment for Unique Needs

The Emily Program's ARFID treatment integrates evidence-based therapies with a multidisciplinary approach. Key features include:

- **Individualized Care Plans**: These care plans are designed to target each person's specific needs whether it be an aversion to specific foods or an avoidance of food altogether. Incorporating techniques like exposures, using fear hierarchies, or hands-on experiential therapies with the foods in home-like kitchen settings, allows a patient to establish a new sense of safety with eating. Families also learn and practice skills to support their loved one.
- **Sensory and Exposure Therapies**: These therapies deliver highly experiential, gradual and supportive exposure to new foods and textures. The individual and family gain exposure to previously feared or avoided foods by interacting with them through a multi-step process builds the individual's confidence to challenge their fears or aversions in a fun and pressure-free way. The goal is to decrease distress around exposures.
- **Medical and Nutritional Support**: Close monitoring by experienced physicians and dietitians ensures nutritional adequacy and addresses underlying food or digestive related conditions.
- **Family-Based Interventions**: Treatment, especially for younger patients, incorporates family-centric programming including family meal exposures, family ARFID education, and specialty skills training for supporting loved ones with ARFID.

The Emily Program's skilled medical professionals, psychiatric providers, licensed therapists, and registered dietitians collaborate to deliver personalized treatment that includes a mix of cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, and family-based treatment with integrative practices such as yoga and expressive arts to support ARFID patients' medical, mental, and nutritional well-being and reduce food-triggered distress. The Emily Program staff throughout the country have received in-depth training to deliver ARFID treatment and support this expansion of services.

Admission counselors are available seven days a week by phone at 1-888-272-0845 or via an online form. No program referral is necessary.

About The Emily Program

The Emily Program is nationally recognized for its compassionate and evidence-based approach to eating disorder treatment. With locations across the country and robust virtual care options, The Emily Program provides accessible, expert care that addresses the physical, emotional, and social aspects of recovery. For more information about ARFID and The Emily Program's services, visit www.emilyprogram.com or call 1-888-272-0845.