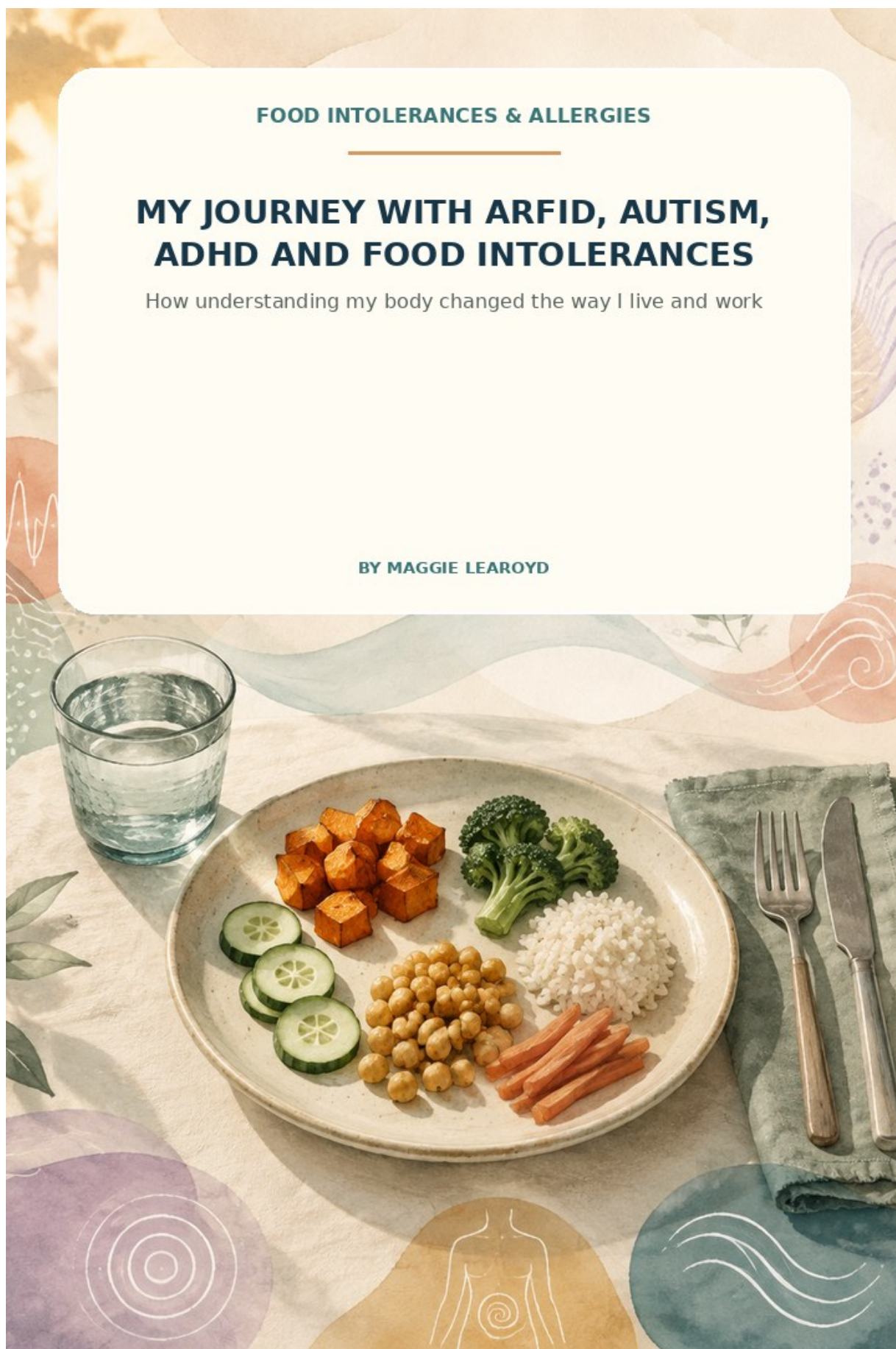


FOOD INTOLERANCES & ALLERGIES

MY JOURNEY WITH ARFID, AUTISM, ADHD AND FOOD INTOLERANCES

How understanding my body changed the way I live and work

BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



My Journey with ARFID, Autism, ADHD and Food Intolerances

How understanding my body changed the way I live and work

If someone had told me as a child that one day I'd be writing articles about food, eating and the relationship between our bodies and our minds, I would never have believed them.

Food was one of the biggest challenges in my life.

It wasn't enjoyable.

It wasn't exciting.

It was something I feared.

I developed ARFID when I was nine years old, although nobody knew what ARFID was back then. Like so many children of my generation, I was labelled a fussy eater. People thought I was being difficult, stubborn or seeking attention.

I wasn't.

I was overwhelmed.

Looking back now, after receiving my autism and ADHD diagnoses at the age of 50, I understand my childhood through completely different eyes.

Food wasn't simply about taste.

It was about texture.

Smell.

Predictability.

Control.

Safety.

And when your nervous system experiences the world differently, something as ordinary as eating can become incredibly complicated.

Growing Up Feeling Different

As a child, I didn't have the language to explain what I was experiencing.

I just knew that certain foods felt impossible.

People would say,

"Just try one bite."

"You're being awkward."

"You'll eat it if you're hungry enough."

Those comments weren't intended to be cruel, but they completely misunderstood what I was experiencing.

Every meal felt like another reminder that I was different.

Looking back, I wish someone had asked me a different question.

Instead of asking,

"Why won't you eat it?"

I wish someone had asked,

"What is it about this food that feels so difficult?"

That single question could have changed everything.

Receiving My Autism and ADHD Diagnosis

When I was diagnosed with autism and ADHD at the age of 50, it felt as though someone had finally handed me the missing chapters of my own life story.

Suddenly my relationship with food made sense.

So did my sensory sensitivities.

My need for routine.

My overwhelm.

The exhaustion of masking.

The more I learned about neurodivergence, the more compassion I found for my younger self.

I stopped seeing myself as someone who had failed.

Instead, I began understanding that my brain had simply processed the world differently.

Becoming Curious About My Health

As both my personal understanding and professional knowledge grew, I became increasingly interested in another question.

Could some of the physical symptoms I'd experienced over the years also be connected to the foods I was eating?

I wasn't looking for a miracle cure.

I wasn't searching for the latest health trend.

I simply wanted to understand my own body better.

I started paying attention.

Keeping notes.

Looking for patterns.

Learning.

The more I listened, the more I realised my body had been communicating with me for years.

I just hadn't known how to interpret the messages.

Discovering My Food Intolerances

When I explored food intolerance testing, I wasn't expecting dramatic answers.

What I found instead was another piece of my personal puzzle.

Some of the foods I had been eating regularly simply weren't agreeing with my body.

That didn't mean those foods were unhealthy.

It didn't mean they would affect everyone in the same way.

It simply meant they weren't the right foods for me.

Making changes wasn't about restriction.

It was about learning how to support my own health with greater understanding.

Gradually I noticed changes.

I had more energy.

My thinking felt clearer.

Some of the symptoms I'd accepted as "normal" became less frequent.

Most importantly, I stopped fighting against my body and started working with it.

How This Changed My Work

My own experiences have made me a better therapist.

Not because I have all the answers.

Far from it.

They've made me more curious.

More compassionate.

More willing to explore every part of someone's story.

When clients come to see me feeling exhausted, struggling with digestive symptoms, experiencing brain fog or simply feeling unlike themselves, I never assume food is the cause.

Mental health and physical health are beautifully complex.

Stress.

Sleep.

Hormones.

Trauma.

Neurodivergence.

Medical conditions.

Relationships.

Lifestyle.

They all matter.

But I've learned never to ignore the possibility that food might also be part of the conversation.

Sometimes it isn't.

Sometimes it is.

Every person deserves to have that explored without judgement.

What I've Learned

If my journey has taught me anything, it's that understanding ourselves rarely happens overnight.

It's built through curiosity.

Through listening.

Through asking questions.

I've stopped chasing perfection.

Instead, I focus on understanding.

Understanding my nervous system.

Understanding my relationship with food.

Understanding how my body responds.

Understanding that what works brilliantly for one person may not work at all for someone else.

That's one of the reasons I feel so passionately about sharing what I've learned.

Not because I want everyone to eat like me.

Not because I believe I've found the perfect way to eat.

But because I know how lonely it can feel when you don't understand why your body reacts the way it does.

If my story encourages just one person to replace self-criticism with curiosity, then sharing it has been worthwhile.

Before You Go...

If you're struggling with food, whether that's because of allergies, intolerances, ARFID, sensory differences or symptoms you can't quite explain, I hope you know this:

You are not alone.

There is rarely one simple answer, and there is certainly no one-size-fits-all approach.

Your body has its own story.

Your experiences are valid.

And you deserve to understand them.

That understanding starts by listening, staying curious and being kind to yourself along the way.

It's a journey I'm still on myself.

Thank you for letting me share part of it with you.

Maggie Learoyd

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Founder of Space to Breathe Therapy

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Testing should be considered alongside symptoms, clinical history and appropriate professional advice. A food allergy can be serious: suspected immediate allergy symptoms require medical assessment. IgG food-reactivity testing is different from diagnostic IgE allergy testing and remains debated, so results should not be used alone to diagnose illness or begin a highly restrictive diet.