

BUST A MYTH AROUND FOOD

MYTH: "Healthy eating looks the same for everyone."

BUSTED: There is no single plate, diet or way of eating that works for everybody.

Nutritional needs vary with age, health, activity, culture, finances, access to food, allergies and intolerances, medication, disability, sensory processing, appetite and many other factors. Mental health matters too. For somebody living with ARFID, an eating disorder, depression, anxiety, ADHD or autism, the most helpful and realistic way of eating may look very different from the picture often presented as 'perfect' healthy eating.

Healthy does not have to mean perfect

Food messages can become rigid very quickly: eat fresh food, avoid processed food, cook from scratch, eat a certain number of portions, never skip breakfast, never eat late, cut out sugar, increase protein. Some general nutrition guidance can be useful, but turning it into rules can create shame and fear. A meal does not lose its value because it came from a packet, freezer, tin or microwave. Convenience foods can provide energy, protein, vitamins, minerals and, importantly, something a person can actually manage to eat.

For ARFID and sensory differences

A 'balanced-looking' plate is not automatically a safe or achievable plate. Smell, texture, temperature, appearance, mixed foods and unpredictability can all affect whether food is manageable. Safe foods are not a failure. They may be the foods keeping somebody nourished while support, confidence and variety are built gradually. Removing them in pursuit of a more conventional diet can make intake narrower rather than broader.

A more useful question

Instead of asking, 'Does this person's food look healthy enough?' we can ask: Are they getting enough to eat? Is eating physically and emotionally manageable? Are there nutritional gaps that need professional support? Are food rules increasing anxiety? What changes are realistic for this individual rather than for an imaginary perfect eater?

MYTH-LED THINKING	A MORE SUPPORTIVE APPROACH
There is one correct way to eat.	Needs and circumstances are individual.
Processed or convenience food is automatically 'bad'.	Accessible food that is eaten can be valuable nourishment.
A healthy plate must look a particular way.	Look at adequacy, variety where possible, safety and the whole pattern over time.
Everyone should be able to follow the same advice.	Adapt support for sensory, medical, cultural, financial and psychological needs.

Message from Maggie

I want people to feel supported around food, not measured against somebody else's plate. Sometimes nourishment begins with the food a person can manage today. We can work from there with curiosity, kindness and appropriate professional support. Different does not mean wrong, and progress does not have to look the same for everybody.

When to seek support: If eating is becoming increasingly restricted, there is significant weight change, fainting, dehydration, physical deterioration, persistent gastrointestinal symptoms, or food is causing substantial distress, seek appropriate medical assessment. A registered dietitian or specialist eating-disorder/ARFID service may also be helpful. This fact sheet is educational and does not replace individual medical or dietetic advice.

Space to Breathe Therapy | Food is personal • Support should be too