



**SYEDA**

SOUTH YORKSHIRE EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

# Dealing with Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)

Charity No. 1114451  
Company No. 5689222



*This resources is for anyone having difficulty with certain types of foods or supporting someone who does.*

*It will take you through 4 steps that are helpful for dealing with these challenges, with exercises to help you learn and make changes as you go.*

# What is ARFID?



**ARFID is an eating disorder. People with ARFID avoid certain foods or food groups, or restrict the amount they eat of certain foods. It is more than “picky eating”.**

ARFID is different to other restrictive eating disorders:

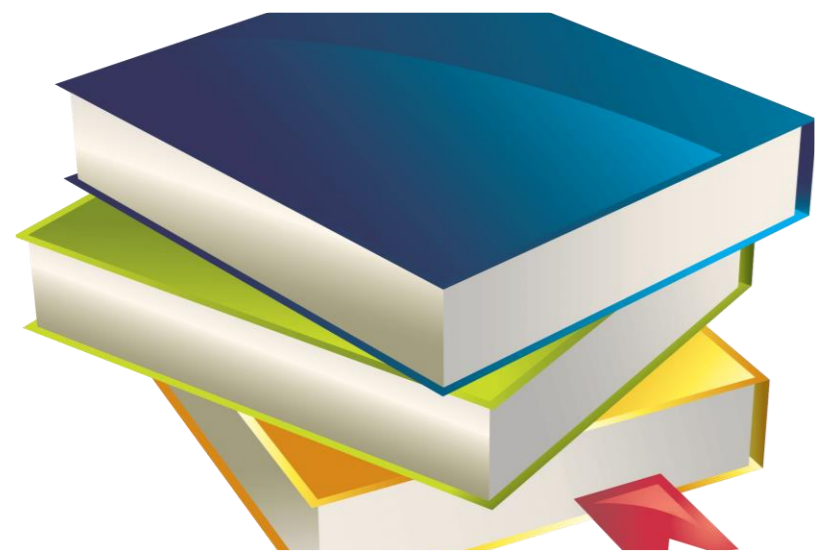
- Having ARFID doesn't affect a person's beliefs about the size and shape of their body.
- Someone with ARFID doesn't restrict their food intake to lose weight.
- ARFID doesn't feature some of the behaviours that can be associated some other eating disorders, like over-exercising.

# Taking 4 steps to dealing with ARFID



We'll use this 4 step approach to help you understand and deal with avoidant and restrictive eating

## STEP 1: Discover



Learn about ARFID and think about how you relate to that information. Does it sound like you or a person you support?

## STEP 2: Plan



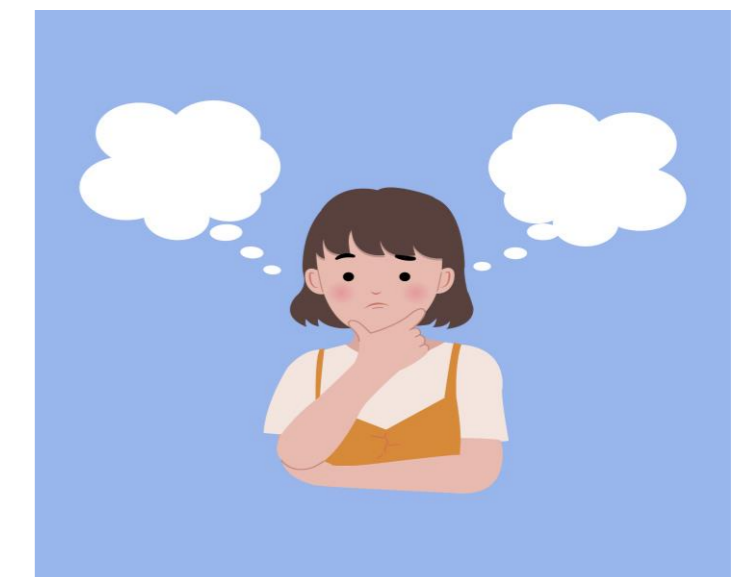
Think about what changes you might make and plan to make them. You might want to do this with someone who supports you.

## STEP 3: Experiment



Face your fears and try different things. Find out how far you can go with new or different foods. Work out what works for you.

## STEP 4: Review

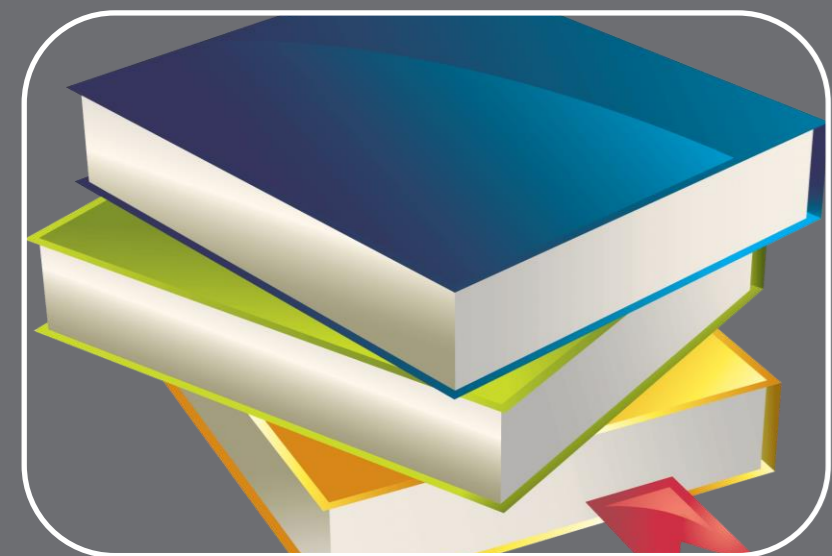


Look back at how far you've come and think about what's worked, what hasn't and what you might do differently.



# STEP 1: Discovering ARFID

In this section we will learn more about ARFID, considering what might cause avoidant and restrictive eating and the impacts these behaviours can have.





ARFID is sometimes described as an 'umbrella term' as it includes a range of difficulties with food

ARFID can look quite different in one person compared to another

**It's important to understand that someone with ARFID is not just being "picky" or "stubborn". They are often fearful and unlike fussy eaters, they cannot be bribed or manipulated to try new foods.**

# Possible reasons for avoiding or restricting food



## Sensory challenges

Food may have strange or intense tastes, textures, or smells, which can be very unpleasant to eat. People with sensory challenges may feel safer eating foods that they are comfortable with.

## Bad experiences

Some people have had scary experiences with food, like throwing up, choking, or allergic reactions, so they may avoid the foods that made them sick, or stop eating altogether.

## Low interest

Some people generally have a poor appetite. Others may have given up trying new food because it is so stressful. Some may not notice they are hungry due to difficulty connecting with their body's signals (poor interoception, common in neurodivergent people).

# The impact of ARFID



## Eating a limited diet

### Eating a very limited diet can:

- cause serious health problems like significant weight loss, osteoporosis, missed periods, muscle wasting and a decreased heart rate
- affect your mood – you might be depressed, irritable, anxious, suffer from exhaustion or find it difficult to concentrate
- make new foods taste even more different

## Eating little or irregularly

### Eating very little or irregularly can:

- make you feel uncomfortably full when you do eat enough, because your stomach capacity decreases when you eat very little
- cause you to feel full quickly, even though you are not getting enough nutrients
- dull hunger cues, especially if you go long periods without eating, meaning you may forget to eat

**You may also feel quite isolated if you find it difficult to eat around other people**

You might also miss out on opportunities to learn about or try new foods if you always eat alone





# STEP 2: Planning changes

In this section we will think about what changes you might make and plan to make them. You might want to do this with someone who supports you.



# Activity 1: your challenges



What are your food and eating challenges? Make a note of which of these challenges concerns you the most from the list below and aim to focus on that first. Trying to change everything at once can be overwhelming.

- A Not eating enough for your energy needs?
- B Not eating a balance of nutrients so you are not getting the nutrients you need?
- C Not being able to eat socially?
- D Something else?

## Activity 2: Understanding your sensory needs/preferences



Have a think about why you like / dislike certain food and record it in your workbook

Think about the effect food has on all your senses

- Texture, is it rough smooth, crunchy etc
- Taste, is it too sweet, sour, spicy etc
- Smell
- Feel of the food
- Look of the food, does it have to look the same, is it ok to be eating in a different format or situation
- Something else?

Is there anything about the environment that can help you? Such as lighting, temperature, noise smell?

# Activity 3: pros & cons of changing what/how you eat



Consider the food or eating challenge you chose to focus on in Activity 1

<b>PROS: What will you gain if you change how/what you eat?</b>	<b>CONS: What will you lose if you change how/what you eat?</b>
Make a list of pros	Make a list of cons

Compare lists to see the good and the bad points of changing what/how you eat

# Activity 4: your goals

The ARFID Intervention Monitoring Sheet (AIMS v1.2) in your workbook will help you to choose goals to aim for, to help you deal with your ARFID symptoms

NAME:

ARFID Intervention Monitoring Sheet (AIMS v1.2)

DATE:

Since \_\_\_\_\_ the following has happened:

Things I am working towards	This isn't an agreed goal for me	Yes - once	Yes - a few times	Yes - some-times	Yes - most times	Yes - all the time	I haven't been able to do this	Comments
1. Being able to eat a bit more/ increase my intake (food/fluid)								
2. Being able to eat three meals a day/spacing								
3. Introducing snacks								
4. Trying new things (foods/drinks/supplement)								
5. Having more of things I sometimes have, that I know are good for me								
6. Having something every day from each of the 4 main EatWell plate sections								
7. Being able to eat together with my family								
8. Being able to eat some of the same meals as my family								
9. Being able to eat with my friends								
10. Being able to eat at school								
11. Being able to go out to eat/eat when out								
12. Not having arguments at home about eating								
13. Not letting my feelings affect my eating								
14. Reducing my intake of supplement(s)								

Please also rate how you have been feeling about things:

	Never	Once or twice	Sometimes	Very often	All the time
1. My eating affects my mood/makes me sad					
2. I worry/ am scared about food and mealtimes					
3. My eating makes it hard for me to be with others					
4. I have felt pleased with how I am changing things to do with eating					

THANK YOU!



# STEP 3: Experimenting

In this section we will help you to face your fears and try different things. You'll find out how far you can go with new or different foods and work out what works for you.



# Exposure and Avoidance Behaviours

## Avoidance can increase anxiety

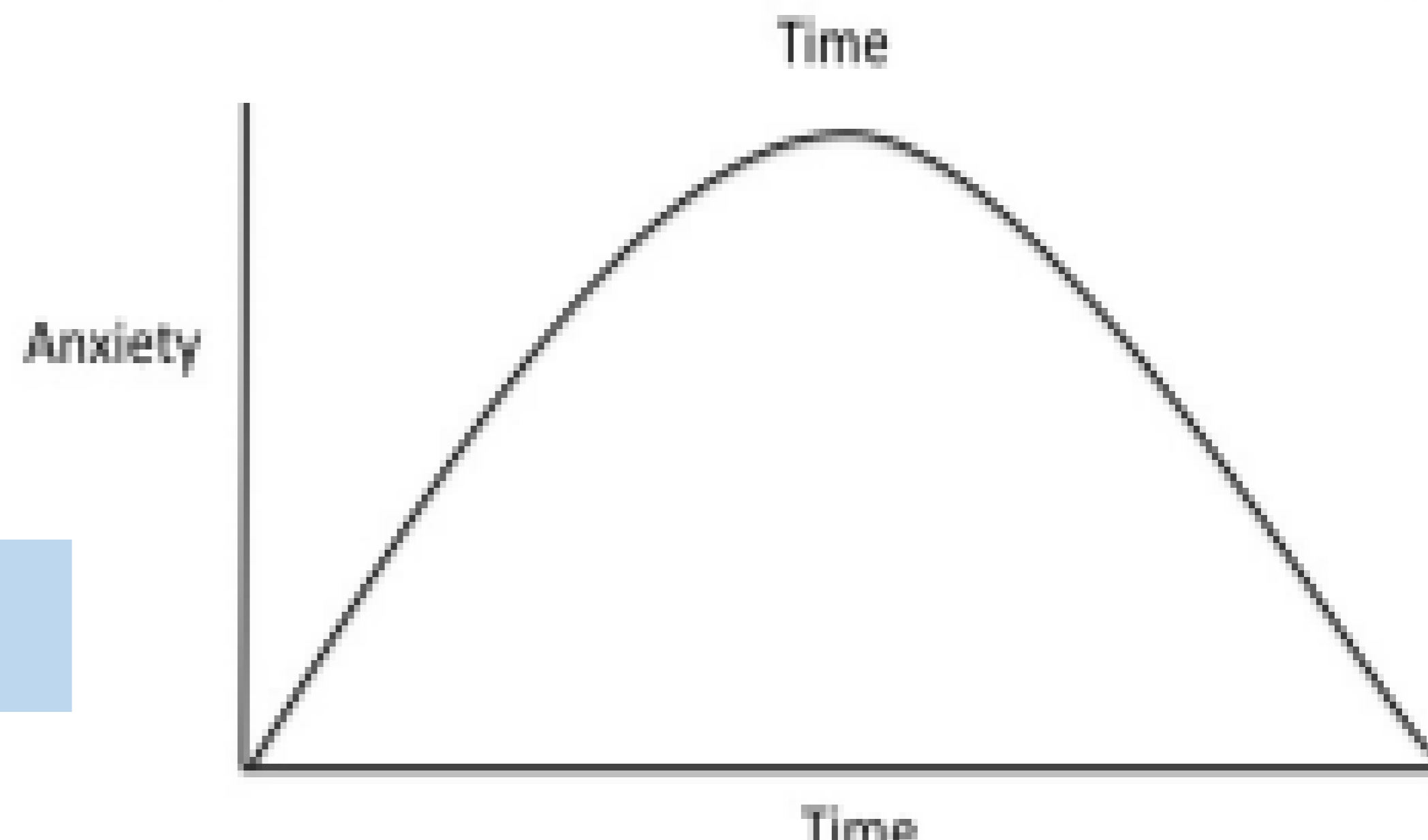
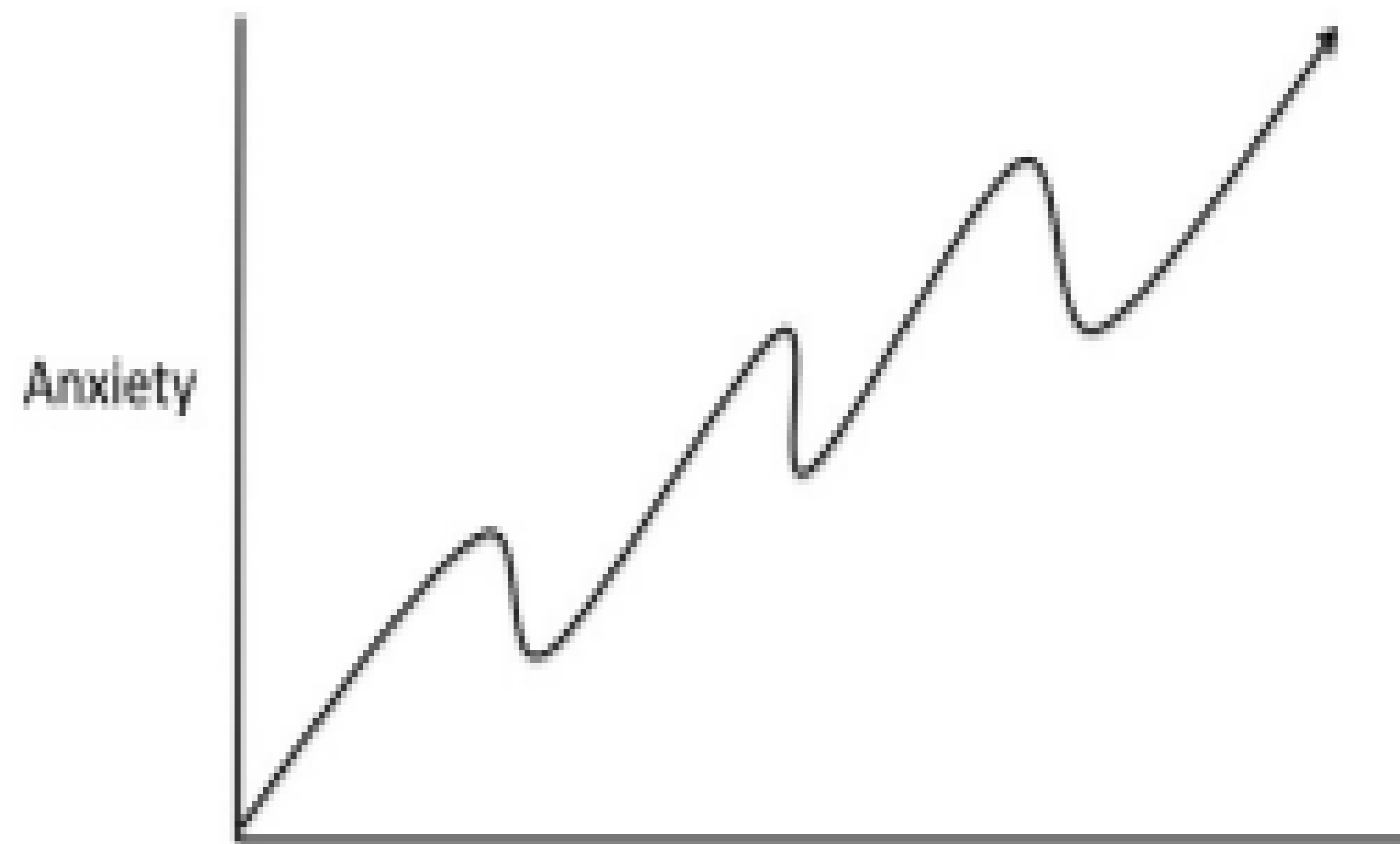
You've probably noticed that anxiety can increase when you think about trying a food you avoid, and can decrease when you decide not to eat it.

**But did you know** that each time you consider trying a food you avoid, but don't try it, anxiety can *increase more* and *decreases less*? You can get more scared and worried every time you avoid eating that food.

## Exposure can decrease anxiety

If you try a food you usually avoid, your anxiety may increase at first, but will likely decrease as you keep trying it.

**If you have sensory issues with certain foods, they will likely *not* go away if you eat them and this approach may not work for you**



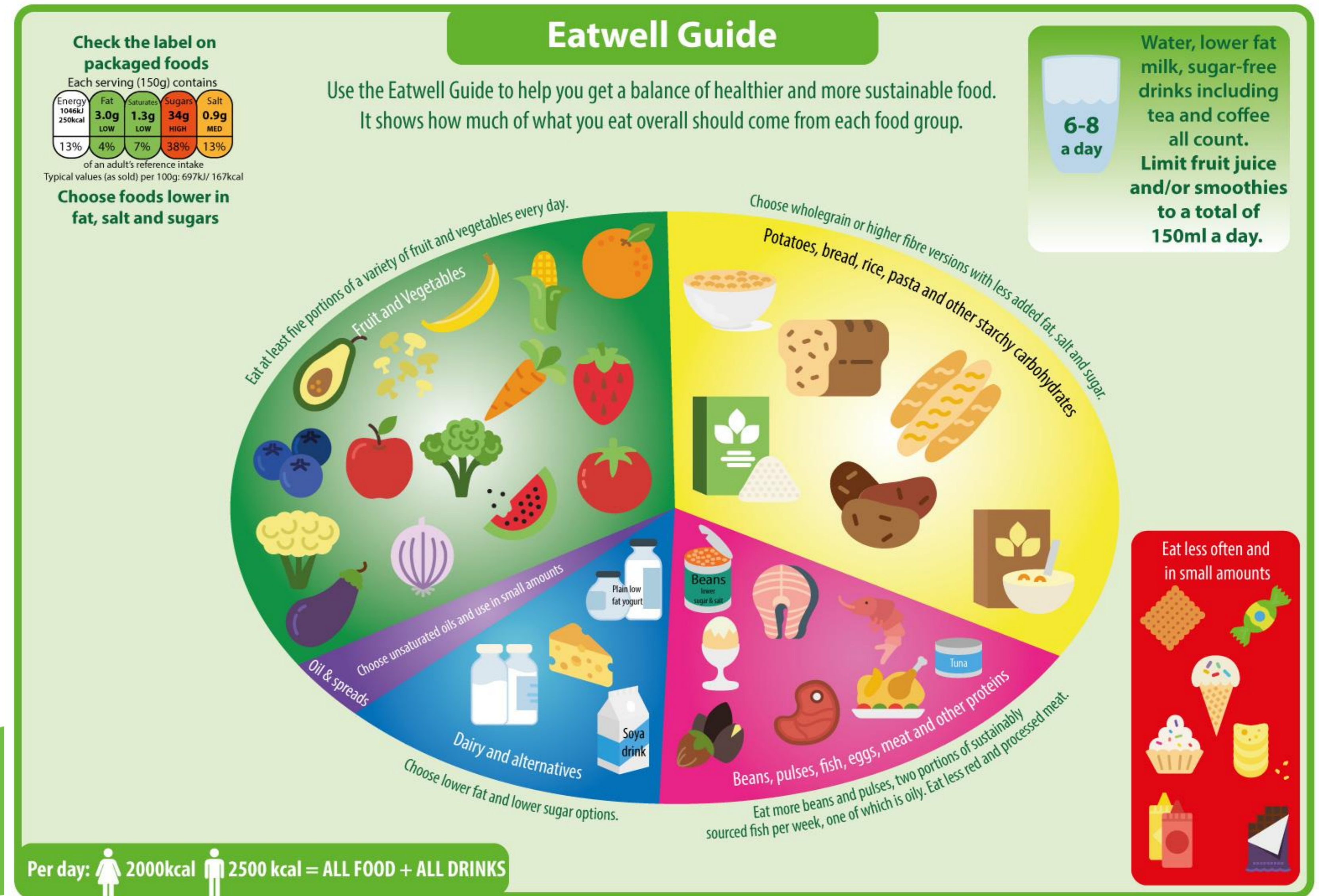




# Eat well plate: A guide to healthy eating?



An eat well plate can be used as a guide to healthy eating and help you to think about what maybe missing from your diet.  
Complete Activity 6



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

# Challenging your fears?



If your AFRID is related to a fear rather than sensory preferences then the following questions/ worksheet can be helpful.

## Complete activity 7

- Exposure scenario:
- What is my worst fear?
- Starting fear score (subjective rating of distress) rating(0–100)
- Starting certainty (%)
- Ending fear score rating (0–100)
- Ending certainty (%)
- Did my worst fear come true? What actually happened?
- What have I learnt from doing this?

Exposure scenario: **Eating salmon**

What is my worst fear? **I will immediately be sick and not be able to stop being sick**

Starting fear score (subjective rating of distress) rating(0–100) **80**

Starting certainty (%) **85**

Ending fear score rating (0–100) **65**

Ending certainty (%) **30**

Did my worst fear come true? What actually happened?  
**I managed to eat it, I did not enjoy it but was not sick**




What have I learnt from doing this?  
**Maybe salmon will not make me sick**

# Activity 8: Exploring new foods



Spending time actually holding, looking at and smelling food can help you feel more comfortable with it and make you less anxious about eating eat. If you are feeling quite comfortable around the food, give it a taste and see what the texture is like.

Focusing on your senses can also help you to reduce fear and anxiety by “grounding” you in your body, and taking you out of your head, where the anxious thoughts are.

 <b>LOOK</b>	 <b>SMELL</b>	 <b>FEEL</b>	 <b>TASTE</b>	<b>&amp; TEXTURE</b>
What does the food look like?	What does the food smell like?	What does the food feel like?	What does the food taste like?	What is the texture of the food like?

# Introducing new foods at home complete activity 9 and 10

## Fade it in

Start with a high portion of your preferred food & add a small portion of the new food. Gradually increase the portion of the new food while fading out the preferred food.

## Change something

Try different presentations of new foods. Try cooked tomato instead of raw, try raw, grated carrot instead of cooked. Try cooking veg for more or less time.

## Add something

Preferred condiments/spices can act as training wheels for trying new foods. E.g. add cheese to your broccoli, ketchup to meat.

## Food chain

Use a preferred food to chain to a new food e.g., if you like potato crisps, try vegetable crisps. If you like ham, try turkey ham.

## Take it apart

If you have never tried a new food before, start by trying one component of the food first and then layering on individual components one-by-one. E.g. pizza – try the crust alone, then crust with cheese, then crust with sauce and cheese.

# Activity 11: Food journal



Try keeping a food journal. Note down the day and time you tried new foods. Think about how you felt, what you were thinking, for instance:

- How did you feel?
- What were you thinking when you tried it?
- Who was around? Were you on your own, or with others?
- What physical sensations did you notice when you tried the food?

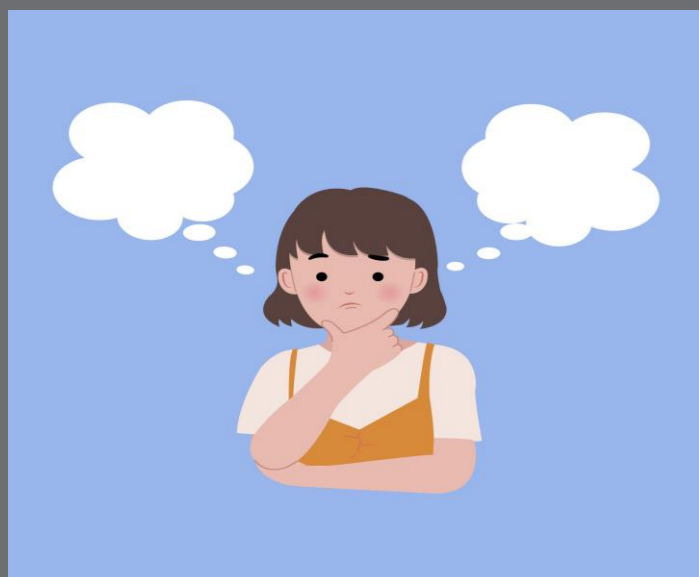
**Distractions** can sometimes change your experience of food so make sure you make a note of what was going on around you.

You might want to do this with a friend or carer. You can use the journal log page on page 11 of your handbook if you wish. Take your time, focus on your senses and how your body feels.



# STEP 4: Reviewing progress

In this section we will look back at how far you've come and think about what's worked, what hasn't and what you might do differently.



# Activity 12: Looking back and moving forward



Take a moment to think about how far you have come and what changes you have noticed.

What has gone well & why?

What was a struggle & why?

What can I try next to keep making positive changes?

You might want to do this with a friend or carer. Sometimes, other people can be more honest with us about what has happened, including how well we have done, than we can with ourselves



# Useful techniques to reduce anxiety



# SIX WAYS TO PRACTICE GROUNDING

with anxiety + intense emotions



## body

lay on the ground, press your toes into the floor, squeeze playdough



## 5 senses

wear your favorite sweatshirt, use essential oils, make a cup of tea



## self-soothe

take a shower or bath, find a grounding object, light a candle



## observe

describe an object in detail: color, texture, shadow, light, shapes



## breathe

practice 4-7-8 breathing: inhale to 4, hold for 7, exhale to 8



## distract

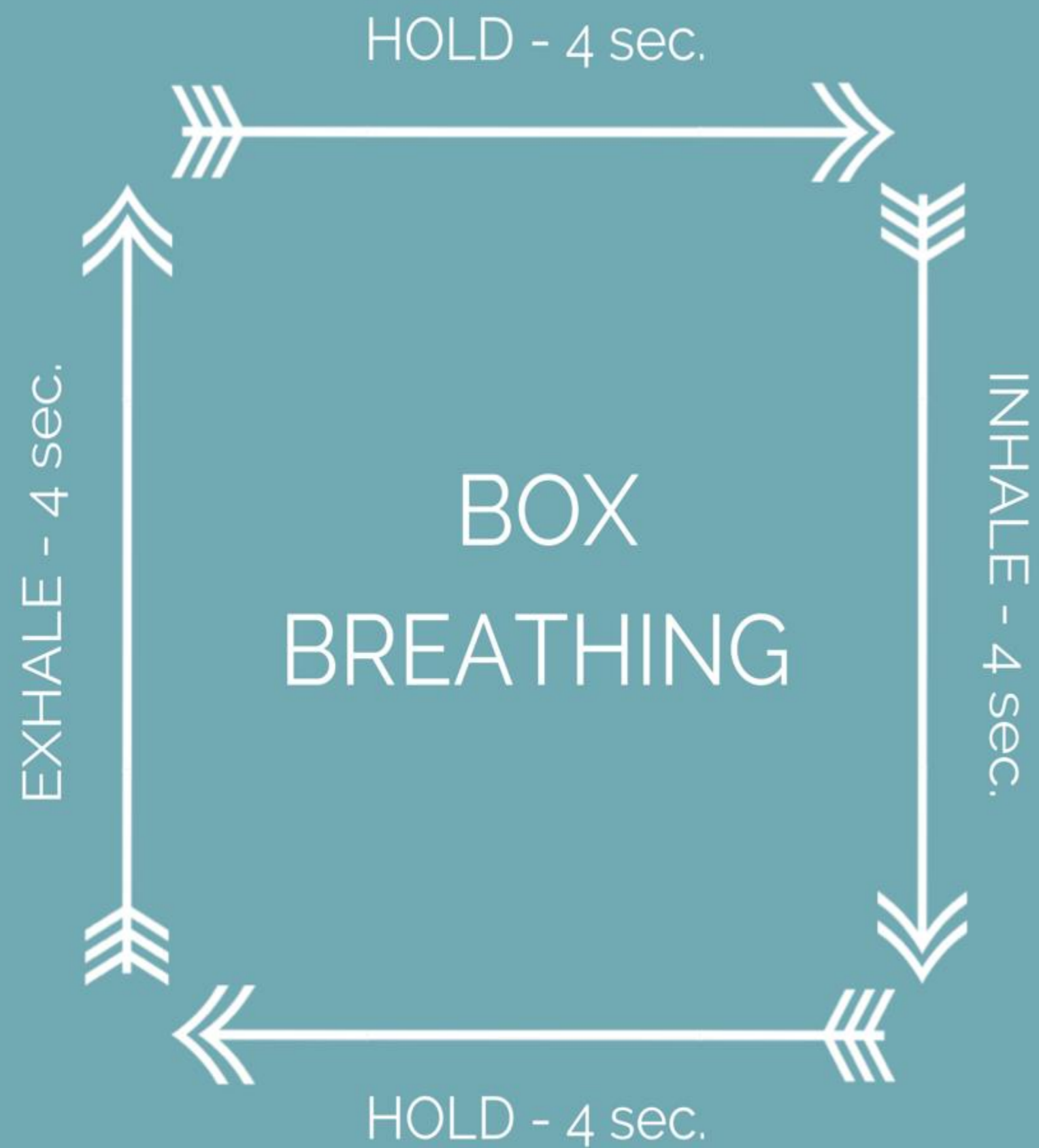
find all the square or green objects in the room, count by 7s, say the date



**Grounding techniques** can be great for helping you manage your anxiety and level out your emotions.

If you start to panic, or feel yourself getting more and more stressed, try these great techniques.

Not all of them will work for you, but one just might. Give them a try and see which suit you best



**Breathing exercises** can be particularly good for quickly calming you down and helping you focus.

Try breathing in for a count of 4, then hold your breath and count to 4, then breathe out for a count of 4, then count 4 before breathing in again.

Repeat this until you feel calm and centred.



# More info & further help

You can find more detailed information about aspects of ARFID in this section

# More info/further help



**WELL DONE!** You've come to the end of the course.

Here are some useful resources that you might find help you keep going on your journey to dealing with ARFID

<https://www.arfidawarenessuk.org/>

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/about-eating-disorders/types/arfid/>

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# Nutritional deficiencies associated with ARFID



- **Calcium:** weak or broken bones
- **Folate:** weakness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, headaches, shortness of breath, heart palpitations, soreness/ulcers in mouth
- **Iron:** difficulty thinking clearly, weakened immune system, low energy, feeling too hot/cold
- **Protein:** loss of lean body mass & decreased energy
- **Vitamin A:** night blindness/inability to see when it is dim/dark, decreased immunity, having severe illness or infections
- **Vitamin B12:** fatigue, weakness, weight loss, constipation, loss of appetite, numbness, tingling, confusion, depression, poor memory, soreness in mouth
- **Vitamin C:** severe deficiency can cause tiredness and weakness
- **Vitamin D:** bone pain, muscle weakness, low mood, skeletal deformities (in children)
- **Vitamin K:** bruising, bleeding in mouth, blood in stool, poor bone health
- **Zinc:** poor growth, loss of appetite, low immune function, taste changes, depression, hair loss, diarrhoea & eye and skin lesions

If you are concerned about any of these, please reach out to your GP as soon as possible

[www.syeda.org.uk](http://www.syeda.org.uk)