Food Has No Moral Value

Why eating can be complicated for neurodivergent brains

INSTEAD OF ASKING

~~good food~~ ~~bad food~~

→

TRY ASKING: HOW DOES IT FEEL?

comfort · energy · pain

Why eating can be hard

Quiet hunger signals

Many autistic and ADHD adults report trouble noticing hunger and fullness.

Bayoumi et al., 2025

Sensory intensity

Texture, smell and taste can feel loud. Wanting the same foods is common.

Bayoumi et al., 2025

Tummy trouble

Autistic children are over 4× as likely to have digestive symptoms.

McElhanon et al., 2014

Too many steps

Shopping, cooking and cleaning take executive function. ADHD meds can lower appetite.

Cleveland Clinic, 2024

1 IN 9
AUTISTIC PEOPLE

More than picky eating. About 1 in 9 autistic people may have ARFID, an eating disorder driven by sensory sensitivity, fear of discomfort or low interest in food, not body image (Sader et al., 2025). If eating feels frightening or out of control, you deserve specialist support.

Fed is best. Any food that gets you fed counts.

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A mindful eating loop



Notice

Eat something, then check in. What did it feel like?



Name it

Comfort, energy, calm, heaviness or pain?



Choose kindly

Use what you learned next time, without rules or guilt.

Intuitive eating is linked with fewer binge and restrictive patterns and more body appreciation (associations, not proof of cause; Linardon et al., 2021). When body signals are quiet, reminders and regular times count as care too.

Sitting with it

Which foods feel safe and good in your body?

What messages did you learn about "good" and "bad" food? Whose voice do they sound like?

What gets in the way of eating on hard days?

CARE FIRST

This handout is not medical or nutrition advice. For pain, big changes in appetite or worry about eating, talk with a doctor or a neurodivergent-affirming dietitian. National Alliance for Eating Disorders helpline: (866) 662-1235.

SOURCES

Bayoumi, S. C. et al. (2025). Food selectivity and eating difficulties in adults with autism and/or ADHD. *Autism*. · Klein, S. et al. (2025). Interoception in autism: systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. · McElhanon, B. O. et al. (2014). GI symptoms in autism: a meta-analysis. *Pediatrics*. · Sader, M. et al. (2025). Co-occurrence of autism and ARFID: meta-analysis. · Linardon, J., Tylka, T. L. & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M. (2021). Intuitive eating and its psychological correlates. *Int. J. Eating Disorders*. · Cleveland Clinic (2024). ADHD medication side effects.