

Introduction

Body dysmorphic disorder, also known as body dysmorphia or BDD, is a type of chronic mental illness. BDD causes you to obsess over your appearance, often for many hours a day. If you have BDD, you may obsess over a flaw that is small or imaginary. The flaw may seem so shameful that you may not want to be seen by anyone. This can impact your ability to function in your daily life. But therapy and medication can be used to treat BDD.

This reference summary explains BDD. It covers symptoms and causes of the condition, as well as treatment options.



Symptoms

Self-esteem and positive body image are important. Feeling good about yourself can affect your mental health and how you behave. Body dysmorphic disorder can negatively impact your self-esteem and body image.

Signs and symptoms of BDD include:

- Worry and anxiety about your physical appearance.
- Intense self-consciousness.
- Strong belief that you have a defect or flaw in your appearance that makes you ugly.

Other symptoms of BDD include:

- Believing that others notice your appearance in a negative way.
- Needing reassurance about your appearance from others.
- Comparing your appearance with that of others.
- Not wanting to appear in pictures.

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BDD may cause you to obsess over a part of your body. The body feature you focus on may change over time.

Some people obsess over their face. You may feel self-conscious about your:

- Nose.
- Skin tone.
- Acne, wrinkles or other blemishes.

Other common features you may obsess about include:

- Hair, such as appearance, thinning and baldness.
- Skin and vein appearance.
- Breast size.
- Muscle size and tone.
- Genitalia.



If you have BDD, you may view yourself in a mirror often, or you may avoid mirrors. You may avoid social situations if you have BDD. You may feel like you need to stay in your home alone. Concern about a perceived flaw can control your life. This can lead to absences from work or school.

You may want cosmetic surgery procedures. A cosmetic procedure to fix a perceived flaw usually will not relieve the stress and shame of BDD. You may not see the results you hoped for. You may start obsessing about another aspect of your appearance and want more procedures.

BDD may cause you to diet and exercise a lot to try to "fix" your perceived flaw. Excessive grooming, such as hair plucking or skin picking, is also a symptom of BDD. You may feel the need to grow a beard or wear lots of makeup or clothing to camouflage perceived flaws.

Shame and embarrassment about your appearance may keep you from seeking treatment for BDD. But if you have any signs or symptoms of BDD, see your health care provider or a therapist.



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Causes

Body dysmorphic disorder may result from a combination of causes. The exact cause of the condition is not known. Abnormalities in a person's brain structure or chemical imbalances may play a role in the development of BDD. BDD may be caused in part by problems related to the brain chemical serotonin. BDD may run in families.

Life experiences and pressure from society and culture may lead to BDD. These factors may make you feel like a person's value only comes from meeting impossible standards of physical beauty.

Risks factors for BDD include:

- Childhood teasing or bullying.
- Low self-esteem.
- Having another psychiatric disorder, such as anxiety or depression.



BDD usually starts during the teenage years. It affects both males and females.

Complications

Body dysmorphic disorder usually doesn't get better on its own. If untreated, it may get worse over time.

Complications of BDD may include:

- Social phobia and isolation.
- Lack of close relationships.
- Substance abuse.

BDD may also lead to:

- Low self-esteem.
- Depression or other mood disorders.
- Suicidal thoughts or behaviors.
- Anxiety disorders.
- Obsessive-compulsive disorders.
- Eating disorders.



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Diagnosis

Your health care provider will perform a physical exam. He or she will ask you questions about your personal and family medical history.

Your health care provider will perform a psychological evaluation. They will talk to you about your:

- Symptoms.
- Thoughts.
- Feelings.
- Behavior patterns.

You may also discuss any thoughts you may have of self-harm. Self-harm is the act of deliberately harming your own body, such as cutting or burning yourself. It's typically not meant as a suicide attempt. It is usually an unhealthy way to cope with emotional pain, intense anger and frustration.



It can be hard to diagnose BDD. It may be similar to or overlap with other psychological conditions. These include eating disorders or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, is unreasonable thoughts and fears that lead you to do repetitive behaviors.

To be diagnosed with BDD, your health care provider will determine if you are preoccupied with an imagined defect or a minor flaw in your appearance. Your health care provider will also find out if worrying about your appearance is causing problems in your social life, work, school or other areas of life. There are several treatment options for BDD and its symptoms.

Treatment

Body dysmorphic disorder is typically treated with a combination of counseling and medication.

A counseling technique known as cognitive behavioral therapy may be used. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a common type of mental health counseling.



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Cognitive behavioral therapy helps you:

- Learn about your condition.
- Focus on your feelings, thoughts, moods and behaviors.
- Use the knowledge you gain in therapy to stop automatic negative thoughts.

Cognitive behavioral therapy can also help you:

- See yourself in a more realistic and positive way.
- Learn healthy ways to handle urges or rituals, such as mirror checking or skin picking.



The symptoms of BDD can be treated with medications. Medications that can help treat serotonin problems in the brain are called SSRIs. SSRIs may help control your obsessions and repetitive behaviors. Your health care provider may recommend other medication to help treat false beliefs caused by BDD.

If your BDD causes severe symptoms, you may need to stay in a psychiatric health care facility. This can help you overcome your symptoms in a safe environment.

Coping and Support

Body dysmorphic disorder can be hard to cope with. Following your treatment plan is important to staying healthy. Go to all of your therapy sessions, even if you don't feel like going. Pay attention to warning signs. Work with your health care provider or therapist to learn what might trigger your symptoms. Make a plan so you know what to do if symptoms return. Contact your health care provider or therapist if you notice any changes in symptoms or how you feel.

Get active. Physical activity and exercise can help manage many symptoms, such as depression, stress and anxiety. Eat a healthy, balanced diet and get enough sleep. Learn relaxation and stress management techniques. Try such stress-reduction techniques as meditation, yoga or tai chi.



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Avoid drugs and alcohol. Alcohol and illegal drugs can worsen mental illness symptoms or interact with medications. Writing in a journal can help you express your pain, anger, fear or other emotions.

Join a support group. Connect with others facing similar challenges. Stay focused on your goals. Recovery is an ongoing process. Stay motivated by keeping your recovery goals in mind.

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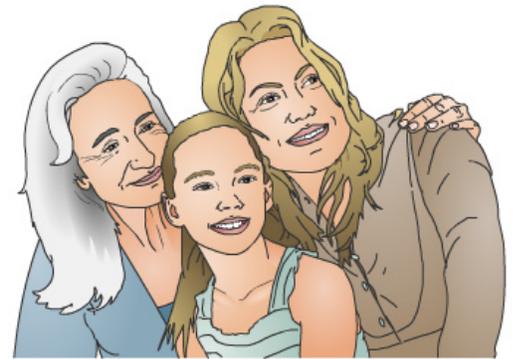
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Body dysmorphic disorder usually doesn't get better on its own. If untreated, it may get worse over time. Complications of BDD may include:

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- Lack of close relationships.
- Substance abuse.



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- Use the knowledge you gain in therapy to stop automatic negative thoughts.

Cognitive behavioral therapy can also help you:

- See yourself in a more realistic and positive way.
- Learn healthy ways to handle urges or rituals, such as mirror checking or skin picking.
- Teach you other healthy behaviors, such as how to socialize with others.



Body dysmorphic disorder can be hard to cope with. Following your treatment plan is important to staying healthy. Go to all of your therapy sessions, even if you don't feel like going. To improve self esteem and body image, try to focus on how strong and healthy your body is and the things it can do.

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