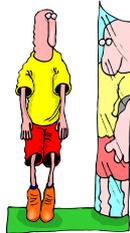


What is Body Dysmorphic Disorder?

What is Body Image?

We all have an image in our minds of how we look and we may evaluate that image in a positive, negative or neutral way. It is important to realise that the term *body image* does not refer to how you actually look. An *image* of something is merely a representation of the real thing. For example, a photograph is a visual representation of the object or person in the photograph, and a memory is a mental representation of a past event. *Body image* therefore refers to a representation that you have of your physical appearance. From time to time most people will feel dissatisfied with some aspect of their appearance, such as thinking they are too short, wishing they had a smoother complexion or a smaller nose. However, some individuals may hold a particularly negative and sometimes distorted view of one or more aspects of their appearance, which can signal a body image problem.



Do I Have a Body Image Problem?

- Do you spend a great deal of time focussed on a particular aspect of your appearance?
- Do you view a particular part of your body as being flawed or defective in some way?
- Do you go to great lengths to improve or conceal the area of concern?
- Have you noticed that your efforts to improve or conceal your perceived flaw are impacting on your life in a negative way?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you are likely experiencing a body image problem, and may meet criteria for Body Dysmorphic Disorder. (Note: While Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Eating Disorders are both thought of as body image problems, they require different treatment approaches. If your bodily concerns are primarily weight/shape related and you have changed your eating patterns because of this, you should speak with your doctor about the possibility of having an eating disorder)

Body Dysmorphic Disorder

The term Body Dysmorphic Disorder, or BDD, is used to describe a body image problem marked by an intense preoccupation with a perceived flaw in one's physical appearance. Individuals with BDD often spend significant periods of time worrying about and evaluating a particular area of concern (e.g., gazing into mirrors or other reflective surfaces, making comparisons with others) and will try to improve or camouflage the area. Common areas that tend to be the focus of preoccupation in BDD include, (but is not limited to):

Skin	Hair on head/body	Nose
Eyes	Teeth/Smile	Buttocks
Eyebrows	Chin/Jaw	Thighs/Calves
Breasts	Genitals	Stomach
Height	Muscles	Scars

Concerns tend to centre around the body part being too big or too small, asymmetrical, not the right shape or colour, or out of proportion to the rest of the body. Usually the perceived flaw that the BDD sufferer is preoccupied with is so slight that others do not notice it or do not consider it important. It may even be completely imperceptible to others. It is important to appreciate that BDD is **not** simple vanity or superficial appearance concerns, it is a real and intensely distressing psychological problem that can interfere significantly with day-to-day activities. People with BDD often suffer from depression, social anxiety and feelings of shame and embarrassment, which can negatively affect their social lives, work and study.

BDD is thought to affect approximately 1-2% of the population and affects men and women equally. Its onset is often during adolescence although most people do not receive a diagnosis until 10-15 years after their symptoms begin. This may be due to the secrecy and shame associated with the problem which affects people seeking help. It can also be because people with BDD tend to try to change their actual physical appearance, as opposed to their *body image*, and can spend many years visiting dermatologists, hairdressers, or plastic surgeons in search of a "cure".