

CAPE BRETON CENTRE  
FOR SEXUAL HEALTH

# Body Dysmorphic Disorder

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# Body Dysmorphic Disorder

Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a mental disorder characterized by the obsessive idea that some aspect of one's own body or appearance is severely flawed and warrants exceptional measures to hide or fix their dysmorphic part on their person.

Individuals with BDD suffer from heightened body shame, stemming from internal and external sources. Individuals with BDD tend to have a negative perception of their own appearance and they tend to believe that others judge their appearance to be undesirable, which can cause heightened levels of anxiety.

## BDD & Sex

Individuals with BDD obsess over physical appearance, which can get in the way of sexual and emotional relationships. Feelings of self-loathing and low self-esteem directly affect the ability to have a positive sexual self-image.



## Examples of BDD

Repetitive behaviours or mental acts:

- Hair pulling
- Skin picking, scratching or carving
- Excessive grooming
- Mirror checking
- Nail biting
- Cheek biting
- Reassurance seeking

## Some Warning Signs

- Spending excessive time in front of the mirror or avoiding mirrors
- Going out of the way to avoid contact with others, especially situations that are socially intense
- Expressing hatred, or general dissatisfaction with general physical appearance or specific body parts.
- Expressing a strong desire to get cosmetic surgery
- Spending more money than the average person on grooming products
- Being hesitant to go out during the day
- Attempting to hide or camouflage parts of their bodies by using makeup, clothes.
- Lateness/anxiety in the morning
- Seeking reassurance about their physical appearance



## Social Media & BDD

Forms of bullying like body shaming, fat shaming, and slut shaming can have a negative influence on body image and lead to low self-esteem, both of which are related to body dysmorphic disorder.

## Body Shame

Body shame appears to drive social isolation. In one study, 94% of youth with BDD described experiencing social difficulties resulting from embarrassment and shame related to appearance. While social media does not cause BDD, it may be a trigger to some people.

## Causes

There is no one cause of BDD, but research suggests that environmental and genetic factors have an influence. High rates of abuse and neglect during childhood have been associated with BDD. Evidence suggests that the disorder is more likely to occur in individuals that have parents or siblings with obsessive compulsive disorder.



## Co-occurring Illnesses

Research suggests that major depressive disorder often co-exists with BDD. Other common, co-occurring illnesses include social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, as well as substance related disorders.

## Is There a Cure?

Evidence suggests that both medication and cognitive behavioural therapy may effectively reduce symptoms of BDD.

Successful treatment may include medication to help reduce obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours.

Cognitive behavioural therapy targets BDD-related thoughts and behaviour patterns in order to reduce repetitive behaviours. Individuals first learn how their thinking patterns contribute to their symptoms and then how to change their thoughts so that symptoms are less likely to occur.

Consult a health care professional for more information.



## Resources

Kate Daigle Counselling.

<https://www.katedaiglecounseling.com>

Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

<https://adaa.org>

Mayo Clinic.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org>