

Body Dysmorphia



This factsheet provides a description of body dysmorphia, its symptoms and the treatments and support options.

What is body dysmorphic disorder?

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is defined as a preoccupation with a perceived defect in one's appearance, e.g. if a slight defect is present (which others hardly notice) it is regarded as markedly excessive.

The term Dymorphophobia is also used by psychiatrists. To warrant a diagnosis the individual's preoccupation must be causing significant distress or handicap in their social or occupational life.

Symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder:

Due to its symptoms BDD may also be associated with:

- OCD – repeated checking of the 'defect'
- Major depressive disorder – feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem
- Delusional disorder – perception that the 'defect' is more pronounced than it is in reality
- Social phobia - people may avoid contact with others due to embarrassment about the 'defect'; those affected may be very fearful of the perceived judgement of others

Onset and incidence of body dysmorphic disorder

It is unclear why this disorder develops. Biological, psychological and social factors have all been implicated. The disorder tends to follow a continuous path. However the focus of the preoccupation may change.

Onset usually occurs in adolescence, though in some instances Body Dysmorphic Disorder can manifest in childhood. It seems to be equally prevalent in men and women. It is not clear how common the disorder is but in cosmetic and dermatological settings it has been reported in as many as 15% of individuals - cosmetic surgery is usually contra-indicated, ie it would generally not be recommended as a means of addressing the perceived body defect.

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Treatment for body dysmorphic disorder

Psychotherapy and counselling are thought to be beneficial in many cases of BDD as these approaches help people get an understanding of factors underlying and contributing to their condition. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can also help.

Medication prescribed tends to be SSRIs that are also used to treat depression, OCD and other anxiety related disorders.

Where can I find help and support?

SANE provides emotional support to anyone affected by mental health problems, including families, friends and carers. Using our database, we can also offer support in considering other options for help, including local services and agencies.

One-to-one support:

- Helpline: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm – 10.30pm every day)
- Email: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/email/
- Textcare: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare/

Peer support:

- Support Forum: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum/

Details can be found on our website at www.sane.org.uk

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