



SA Federation for  
Mental Health

## OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE AND RELATED DISORDERS

### BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

#### What it is:

Body dysmorphic disorder (formerly known as dysmorphophobia) is an obsession with one or more perceived flaws or defects in an individual's physical appearance. The individual typically believes that these flaws or defects look ugly, unattractive or even deformed, even though these perceived flaws are slight or not noticeable to others. The intensity of the perceived flaws may vary, from an individual believing they are "ugly" or "unattractive", to them describing their appearance as "hideous" or "monstrous." This obsession can be focused on one or more parts of the body, such as the skin, hair, nose, eyes or teeth. This obsession with perceived physical flaws can be time consuming and difficult for the individual to control. Excessive repetitive behaviours or mental acts are often performed as a response to the physical obsession. This may include comparing oneself to others, repeatedly checking one's reflection in a mirror or trying to cover up the disliked area with clothing or make up.

Muscle dysmorphia is a form of body dysmorphic disorder found predominantly in males, and it concerns an obsession with the idea that an individual's body is too small or not lean or muscular enough. Body dysmorphic syndrome can lead to major impairments in an individual's ability to function in everyday life. The suicide risk for individuals with body dysmorphic disorder, especially in those younger than 18, is also high.

#### Common symptoms:

1. Obsession with one or more perceived physical flaws or defects that appear slight or not noticeable to others
2. Repetitive behaviour, such as mirror checking, skin picking, excessive grooming, or mental acts such as comparing oneself to others, as a response to perceived appearance flaws
3. This obsession with physical flaws or defects causes significant impairment to the individual's ability to function at home, school or work
4. The obsession with appearance is not better explained by concerns over weight and body fat, and so cannot be attributed to an eating disorder



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### **Causes:**

The typical age of onset for this disorder is before the age of 18. Environmental factors such as childhood neglect and abuse have been associated with body dysmorphia disorder. There may also be a genetic component, as first degree relatives of individuals with body dysmorphia and obsessive compulsive disorder are more likely to develop the disorder.

**Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.**

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:  
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*