

Evidence-based treatment options for Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)

Guidance for Psychiatrists, Family Physicians,
and Nurse Practitioners



Developed by:

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A. Psychological treatment:

Cognitive-behavioral therapy, or CBT, is the first line of treatment for BDD. This type of treatment typically involves a technique known as exposure and response prevention (ERP).

In BDD, exposure aims to decrease mirror checking, camouflaging, and other compulsive behaviors. It is also intended to prevent behaviors such as avoiding social situations. CBT is effective, but some people with BDD fail to respond. Some improve slightly, and some are unwilling to participate in ERP. For these reasons, it is useful to consider a different approach in conjunction with CBT.

Acceptance and commitment therapy, or ACT, is one such treatment. ACT focuses on tolerating thoughts and symptoms rather than trying to change, dispute, and generate alternative interpretations of problems. People with resistant BDD may benefit from ACT because it teaches how to tolerate anxiety-provoking situations.

This type of therapy incorporates the core concepts of mindfulness, acceptance, and value-based living.

- **Mindfulness:** Developing the ability to be present in the moment and the ability to observe without making judgments.
- **Acceptance:** The ability to distinguish between pain and suffering and being able to tolerate and live with pain.
- **Value-based living:** The ability to live according to your values and not your symptoms; living fully now instead of waiting to reduce your symptoms.

B. Pharmacological treatment:

Although Health Canada has not approved any specific medications to treat BDD, medications used for conditions such as depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder can be effective.

- **Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs):** Because BDD could be caused in part by problems related to the brain chemical serotonin, SSRIs may be prescribed. SSRIs appear to be more effective for body dysmorphic disorder than other antidepressants and may help control your negative thoughts and repetitive behaviors.
- **Other medications.** In some cases, individuals may benefit from adding a low dose of mood stabilizers such as aripiprazole to their SSRI medication if their symptoms are not sufficiently controlled.