

Body Dysmorphic Disorder

When Obsessive Appearance Fears Drive the Need to Self-Medicate



What is Body Dysmorphic Disorder?

Body Dysmorphic Disorder is a mental health condition in which a person becomes consumed by a perceived flaw in their appearance that others cannot see or consider minor. The obsessive thoughts drive compulsive behaviors like mirror-checking and reassurance-seeking, creating debilitating shame that disrupts relationships, work, and daily life.

What Does it Look Like?

- > **Obsessive Appearance Checking**
Hours spent examining perceived flaws that you cannot see.
- > **Social Withdrawal**
Avoiding events, photos, and people out of shame.
- > **Reassurance Seeking**
Repeatedly asking you to confirm or deny imagined flaws.
- > **Compulsive Rituals**
Excessive grooming or skin picking consuming hours each day.

How Does Body Dysmorphic Disorder Contribute to Relapse?

For someone with BDD, the obsessive thoughts never stop and the shame never fades, making substances the fastest way to briefly quiet what nothing else can.

- 1) **Substances Quiet the Obsession**
Substances briefly silence relentless, obsessive appearance fears.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Miss the Pattern**
Appearance obsessions persist even when substances stop.
- 3) **Without Treating BDD, Shame Returns**
Untreated BDD leaves the same shame that drives use.

Prevalence:
2.4% of U.S.¹

Co-Occurrence:
~30% develop a substance use disorder in their lifetime²

Relapse Risk:
Significant Increased risk of treatment dropout and relapse³

Sources: ¹ [Koran LM et al., CNS Spectrums \(2008\)](#).
² [Phillips KA, International OCD Foundation \(2023\)](#).
³ [Grant JE et al., Journal of Clinical Psychiatry \(2005\)](#)

Long-Term Treatment for Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Addiction

BDD's obsessive thought patterns do not resolve in 30 days. Someone whose appearance fears have driven years of substance use needs extended treatment that addresses both the addiction and the distorted thinking that sustains it.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** gives clients the time to genuinely change how they relate to shame and self-perception, not just how they behave. Clients advance when they demonstrate real change.



“BDD and addiction create a relentless loop. The obsessive thoughts about appearance drive substance use. The substance use deepens shame and distorted thinking. Breaking that loop takes months of sustained clinical work, not weeks of surface-level coping skills.”

 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Body Dysmorphic Disorder

When BDD goes unaddressed, treatment removes the coping mechanism without ever resolving the obsessive thinking and shame that drive it.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**
Unaddressed appearance obsessions sustain substance use.
- **Changing Distorted Thinking Over Time**
Distorted thinking requires months of sustained clinical work.
- **Providing Enough Time for Real Change**
BDD and addiction reinforce each other, requiring extended care.

Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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