

Extreme insecurity about appearance

Everyone worries about his or her appearance at times. However, sometimes insecurity about one's appearance plays such a major role in someone's life that it affects one's well-being. If you are extremely concerned about a very specific aspect of your appearance, this could suggest a form of body dysmorphic disorder. This means that you are so preoccupied with an unusual aspect of your appearance, which seems to you to be extremely visible, but which is not interpreted in that same way by other people. For the individual person, it feels as if the specific body part is hugely conspicuous or unusual and he or she cannot stop thinking about it. This causes significant stress in everyday life and can restrict how you operate socially, professionally or in other key areas of life.

If your main concerns are about being too fat or feeling uncomfortable with your genitals, this may suggest an eating disorder or an issue with gender identity.

In many cases, the problem is not immediately recognised. After all, for the person affected, the unusual aspect of appearance is very real and they may sooner turn to a dermatologist or plastic surgeon in search of a solution.

QuickScan

- Are you particularly concerned about a specific aspect of your appearance, such as your skin, hair, breasts or genitals and do you try to hide this (using make-up, clothes, etc.)?
- Is your life completely dominated by this insecurity?
- Do other people say that they cannot see anything particularly unusual even though you are sure it is there?
- Are you considering making an appointment with the dermatologist, dentist, plastic surgeon or another specialist to make changes to your body?
- Or are you trying to develop an enormous mass of muscle and is this affecting your entire life?
- Does your preoccupation with your appearance result in you preferring to avoid social situations or study activities?
- Do you suffer from serious depression, or have done in the past?

Approach

What can you do yourself?

Try finding out whether your concerns are actually proportionate to how you look in reality, for example by asking people you know to give their objective opinion about it.

What can we do for you?

It is important to learn to cope with your insecurity and gain control of your life again. We can offer you short-term individual consultation and/or help you look for a suitable treatment outside of TU Delft. Visit <http://psychologists.tudelft.nl>.

More information

- James Claiborn and Cherry Pedrick. *The BDD Workbook: Overcome Body Dysmorphic Disorder and End Body Image Obsessions*. Oakland, Calif.: New Harbinger Publications; 2002.
- Katharine Phillips. *The Broken Mirror: Understanding and Treating Body Dysmorphic Disorder*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2005.
- Harrison Pope, Katharine Phillips, and Roberto Olivardia. *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession*. New York, NY: The Free Press; 2000.
- Sabine Wilhelm. *Feeling Good About The Way You Look: A Program for Overcoming Body Image Problems*. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2006.

