

■ Why Not Give the Right Treatment a Try?

Most people with BDD will need treatment with a professional to get better. The good news is that there are treatments that work. I hope that if you suffer from BDD, you'll be willing to try the recommended treatments after reading this book (please read the next two chapters!). Most people get better if they give the right treatment a good try. There's a good chance you'll get more control over your obsessions and compulsive behaviors, get your life back on track, and be relieved of worry, anxiety, and depression.

You've already put in a huge effort just putting up with BDD—so you probably also have the ability to overcome it. With the right tools—the right treatment—you **can** do something to solve the problem and start feeling better! Why not take steps to get control of your life, rather than continuing to be controlled by your BDD symptoms?

Yet, some people are reluctant to try treatments that are likely to help them, perhaps because they fear stigma or feel ashamed. But as I discussed earlier, you don't need to buy into any of this. Some people misunderstand BDD and its treatment. Other people insist that surgery is the solution. Still others desire to get better "on their own." By the time you finish reading this book, I hope you'll agree that none of these reasons should get in the way of getting effective treatment and feeling better.

Why deny yourself treatment that's likely to help you feel better? What do you have to lose by trying it? While SRIs can have side effects and CBT can be challenging, most people do well with these treatments and easily tolerate them. There are lots of misconceptions about both of them (see the "frequently asked questions" in the next two chapters). You shouldn't feel or look "drugged" while taking an SRI, and these medications aren't addictive. If medication side effects occur, or CBT is too hard, a good doctor or therapist will work with you and probably succeed in making them tolerable.

Even if you think you don't have BDD, because you think you're truly ugly, what's the down side of giving the BDD diagnosis and treatment a chance and find out if they work for you? If you think you might **possibly** have BDD, or if other people think you do, why not read the rest of this book to become more informed about BDD?

Unless you give treatment a try, you can't know how good you might feel. One option is to try an SRI or CBT as an "experiment" to see how it affects you. You can usually tell if an SRI will work within three months (assuming it's being dosed correctly), and CBT often starts working within this amount of time as well. If you give the medicine a good try, you can see how you feel. Then you'll be in an excellent—and much more informed—position to decide whether to continue the treatment or not, or whether to give another one a try. You always have the option of going back to the way things are now if you want. Trying treatment doesn't mean that you have to continue it for the rest of your life.

Some people are reluctant to try treatment because a friend or family member tried it and didn't get better, or because they read about someone on the internet who didn't like it. But is this really a good way to make a decision for yourself? You're a different person from them, and you may have a different outcome with the treatment. Also, they may not have really gotten the right treatment (which I describe in more detail in the next two chapters)—many people with BDD don't. A better way to make a decision is to read the next two chapters to become knowledgeable about the treatment

options, and then discuss these treatment options with a qualified professional. You owe it to yourself to make an intelligent decision and to choose for yourself.

If you still have reservations about getting treatment, you can make a list of the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages, or costs) of your BDD. Are there any advantages to having it? Maybe you can think of some and maybe not. What about disadvantages? Is BDD causing problems for you? Are you living the life you want to be living, and, if not, is this because your symptoms are getting in the way? Are you experiencing disadvantages from BDD like the following:

- Feeling depressed, sad, ashamed, angry, frustrated, guilty, or stressed?
- Not being able to be in a relationship?
- Not being able to go to school or work?
- Fighting with your partner or your family because of your appearance problems?
- Spending too much money on beauty products, clothes, or cosmetic treatments such as electrolysis or surgery?
- Scarring from skin picking?
- Loneliness and isolation?
- Self-hatred or low-self-esteem?
- Stress on your relationships?
- Being late for things?
- Not being able to participate in activities or see friends because of your BDD?
- Wasting time on rituals?
- Not managing your household well?
- Not focusing enough on your children's needs?
- Using street drugs or alcohol to try to cope with your problem?
- Are there other disadvantages for you? (you may want to look back at Chapter 7 for additional disadvantages of BDD that may apply to you)

Next you can ask yourself whether you want to change. Do you want to overcome these problems? You can make a list of potential pros (positive consequences) and cons (negative consequences) of getting treatment. You might feel that there are some cons, such as taking the time for appointments or the cost. You'll also need to make an effort and participate in the treatment. Maybe there are others for you.

If you're reluctant to try treatment, you've probably given the potential cons of treatment more thought than the pros. You owe it to yourself to take a little time to think through what advantages there could be. You may want to ask friends or family to help you think this through.

Might there positive consequences, like the following?

- Feeling happier and less anxious and stressed
- Having better self-esteem and feeling more confident
- Feeling more comfortable around other people
- Starting to date
- Getting along better with your partner or your family
- Making new friends
- Being able to go out and do things you'd like to do (like shopping, eating out, or seeing friends)
- Doing things with family and friends

- Concentrating better on school or work
- Going back to school or work
- Being on time for things and not keeping people waiting for you
- Stopping problematic use of alcohol or drugs
- Saving time and money
- Letting your skin heal (by not picking any more)
- Being a better parent
- Managing your household and life better

Are there other potential advantages for you? List as many as you can.

Might there be advantages for your friends and family members if you get better?

Some of the patients I've worked with have been reluctant to try treatment, but most are very glad that they did. Anne, who got much better with an SRI, told me, "I'm feeling terrific, for the first time in 30 years." And after CBT, Jason felt that he—not the BDD—was in charge of his life.

Cassandra described herself as a caged animal—her obsessional thinking locked her in a place where she had no freedom or pleasure. Effective treatment freed her; it allowed her to regain control of her life.

Here's what other patients told me, after they got the right treatment:

- Jorge:** "The treatment I got was very freeing—it's lifted an amazing burden. I regret that I put it off for so many years." He hadn't been interested in psychiatric treatment and had put it off for 20 years. He finally got tired of trying to treat himself; his approaches weren't working, and he was worn out and not living the life he'd hoped for. He decided he had nothing left to lose.
- Nathaniel:** "I can talk to people without feeling they're staring at me. I'm better able to resist mirror checking. I spend less time obsessing. It comes into my mind less and it's easier to get rid of the thoughts. I can argue with myself that my obsession is irrational—I tell myself, 'just shrug it off!' I'm not so self-conscious around people anymore. It's not a life or death problem for me now."
- Sandy:** "The medication definitely curbs the obsession. It released a logjam. My life felt like a stream that had thousands of huge boulders and logs in it—the water couldn't flow through smoothly. Now it flows with ease. I feel full of energy and creativity."
- Christina:** "I just wasn't seeing myself clearly before. I feel calmer, happier, and more confident. It's hard to believe the medication has made this much of a change, but it has. I feel the way I used to feel, before the BDD ever started. I feel great!"
- Jason:** "I really feel better after the CBT. The BDD isn't controlling me anymore! Tell people, 'Don't be afraid to get help!'"