

Become Aware Of Your Body Image Problem

1. Identify The Problem Feature

Identify the feature(s) of your body that you dislike or would like to improve and precise for each feature whether you are seeking a cosmetic or dermatological procedure for the feature either now or in the future.

Estimate the percentage of concern allocated to each feature.

The problem feature	Are you seeking a cosmetic procedure?	Percentage of concern

2. Identify The Noticeability Of Your Problem Feature

You may find it helpful to discuss with a trusted friend or therapist how noticeable your feature is to other people (if you do not camouflage yourself, e.g. with clothes, padding, makeup, and the feature has not been pointed out to them)

You could ask this person to rate the features using a scale from 0 to 10 without him or her knowing how you rated yourself.

The problem feature	Noticeability (0-10)

3. Identify The Severity Of Your Body Image Symptoms

Rating the following elements will help you identify the severity of your body image problem, but also monitor your progress in overcoming it:

Frequency – How much time on an average day you are occupied by worries about your appearance and related behaviors (e.g. checking, comparing) over the past week?

Distress – How much distress these worries have caused you? Or how much distress do you experience when confronted with a situation you wanted to avoid?

Handicap – How much have your worries about your appearance and related behaviors (e.g. checking, avoiding) interfered with your professional life and personal life?

Avoidance – How much have you avoided situations or activities because of your feature(s)?

Situations and activities avoided might include:

- A party or social gathering
- A medical examination
- Exercising in a gym
- Wearing a swimming costume on a beach
- Being physically close to someone
- Certain types of clothes
- Certain types of lighting looking at picture in magazines or on TV
- All or certain mirrors that are unsafe
- Having a photo or video taken by someone else
- Looking at old photographs
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Identify Your Rituals And Safety Behaviors

Your safety behaviors are the things you may be doing excessively or more precisely because of your preoccupation with your problem feature(s).

The goal here is to identify these safety behaviors and work on changing them.

These rituals and safety behaviors might include:

- Checking your feature(s) in mirrors and other reflective surfaces (e.g. cutlery, windows, CDs, etc)
- Using a particular light to check your feature(s) in a mirror
- Checking your feature(s) by taking photographs of yourself
- Checking your feature(s) by feeling it/them with your finger
- Comparing your feature(s) with others in magazines or on TV
- Comparing your feature(s) with those of other people you meet
- Comparing your feature(s) with old pictures of you
- Wearing something (e.g. jewellery a baseball cap, hat, scarf, baggy clothing) to divert attention from your problem features
- Asking others to confirm the existence of a defect in your problem feature(s)
- Seeking reassurance about whether your problem feature(s) has/have gotten worse
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

5. Identify The Impact Of Your Symptoms On Your Life

The next step is to rate the impact of your problem feature(s) on your everyday life.

To do that, consider the following question and rate on a scale from 0 to 10 the impact of your problem feature(s) on each area of your life:

* If you are in a long-term relationship, to what extent does your preoccupation with your feature(s) affect your relationship (e.g. number of arguments, enjoying activities together)?

* If you are not in a long-term relationship, to what extent does your preoccupation with your feature(s) currently affect you and your dating or developing a relationship?

* Regarding your work or studies, to what extent does your preoccupation with your feature(s) currently interfere with this area?

* Regarding your social life (e.g. parties, outings, visits, home entertainment), to what extent does your preoccupation with feature(s) currently interfere with this area?

* Regarding your private leisure activities (e.g. reading; gardening; collecting; walking alone, etc.), to what extent does your preoccupation with your feature(s) currently interfere with this area?

* Regarding your mental health (e.g. depression, anxiety, feelings of shame, etc.), to what extent does your preoccupation with your feature(s) currently interfere with this area?

Describe Your Goals

After identifying the problem feature(s), its impact, and the safety behaviors you're using, write down a description of your goals relating to the problem feature(s).

Start with short-term goals that are easier to tackle, and set yourself a realistic timeline by which you intend to move onto the next set of goals.

Setting Goals

For example, someone might feel very preoccupied and ashamed about their skin, they might waste so much time applying make-up each time they have to leave the house.

Some of the goals to tackle this problem might involve the following:

Short-term goals

- Cutting down the number of foundations they use
- Stop comparing their skin with others
- Stop picking their skin and let it heal by itself
- Inviting a friend for a coffee
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Medium-term goals

- Meeting up with friends
- Going swimming again
- Go out to shopping centers
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Long-term goals

- Dating and developing a long term relationship
- Make your own goals as specific and realistic as possible.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

If you can't imagine what a healthier alternative could be, consider the following:

* What did you do before you had a body image problem?

* If you had a friend, who was the same as you but without a body image problem, what would they do?

* What would a healthy role model of yours do?

Your goals should relate to your values in life and tackle what you have been avoiding.

Regularly review your progress and rate it on a scale from 0 to 10.

Goal	Progress (0-10)

Change Your Thoughts

Body image problems often occur when your thoughts become fused with facts. This makes your reality very unpleasant, but also distorted.

For instance, if you feel ugly, your ugliness is taken as a given fact and you assume that others will view you the same way.

Most people respond by trying either to escape from the thoughts and images or to control them, but that seems to only intensify their impact on your body image problem.

This is why you need to change relationship with your thoughts and images and treat them as ‘just thoughts’ or ‘just a picture in my mind’.

1. Step Back From Your Thoughts

The first step is to distance yourself from your unhelpful thoughts and notice them with curiosity without believing them to be true.

Then identify the ways in which your thinking might be affected by your body image problem, and take these negative thoughts with a huge pinch of salt.

Think of these intrusive thoughts as body shame propaganda, trying to lower your morale and keep you preoccupied and distressed.

Labeling Your Thoughts

Write your intrusive thoughts down.

For example,

‘I am having a thought that I am fat.’

'I am having a memory of being bullied as a child.'

Thought: _____

Challenge your distorted thoughts by asking yourself the following questions:

1. What evidence do I have that what I believe is actually true?

2. Am I confusing a thought with a fact?

3. Am I falling into a thinking trap (e.g., catastrophizing or all-or-nothing treatment)?

4. What would I tell a friend if he/she had the same thought?

Watch Your Thoughts Pass By

The goal here is to distance yourself from your thoughts by noticing your intrusive thoughts without engaging with them, rather watch them pass by like being on the pavement, watching cars pass on a road.

- * Get into a relaxed position and just observe the flow of your thoughts without engaging with them.
- * Imagine sitting next to a stream with a number of leaves on the surface of the water, drifting slowly downstream.
- * When thoughts come, put each thought on a leaf, and watch the leaf slowly moving away from you, drifting out of sight. Repeat the same with every thought that comes to your mind.
- * When you are ready, bring your attention back to present and notice your body sensation and sounds around you, then slowly open your eyes and get back to life.

Exposure

As you become more aware of your body image problems and how you can control it, the next is exposure – facing situations that you have been avoiding because of your anxiety that something bad might happen.

Doing this, will help reduce your fears and anxiety and change your beliefs about your body-image.

1. Gradual Exposure

Exposure needs to be done in a gradual manner and without using any safety seeking behaviors (e.g. keeping your head down, using excessive make-up, wearing bulky clothes, keeping your hand up to your face).

Remind yourself that anxiety, though uncomfortable, will not damage you. And that avoidance though relieving, will reinforce and intensify your body image problem.

Step 1. Write down a hierarchy of fears

Write down a list of the things you tend to fear or avoid because they activate your worries, such as activities, situations, people, words or ideas.

Order the items based on the amount of distress they cause.

Step 2. Face your fear – ‘just do it’

Start with the least item you fear and make a plan to deliberately face it.

Make exposure long enough and keep facing the same item until you feel comfortable enough to move on to the next item on your list of fears.

Step 3. Do not use anxiety-reducing strategies

Exposure should be done without anxiety-reducing strategies such as alcohol, drugs and other safety-seeking behaviors (e.g. obtaining reassurance).

‘Fully engage’ with the situation and face any intrusive thoughts or uncomfortable sensations.

If you use a safety-seeking behavior, you need to redo the exposure, or expose yourself again to the previous item, until you become comfortable enough.