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## How to use zoom basics

Photo Courtesy: Alistair Berg/DigitalVision/Getty Images In a March 2020 conversation with GeekWire, Zoom’s Chief Executive Officer Eric Yuan described what he believed would be a permanent and fundamental shift in the ways we work: using video for remote worker collaboration. People worldwide have seen the job-related impact of Zoom and similar meeting technologies as these tools have become essential for communication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. And they’ve certainly been helpful for facilitating meetings with colleagues — but they may also be making a bigger impact on our mental health and well-being than we might’ve anticipated. According to the International OCD Foundation, approximately one in 50 Americans lives with a condition called body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), which affects how people feel about their physical appearance. People with BDD have been experiencing intensifying symptoms in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, in part because spending so much time on camera in virtual meetings is making it easier to fixate on the way we look. But how exactly does this condition relate to Zoom calls? It turns out that people who’ve been spending more time than ever in video conferences are showing some of the symptoms of BDD, leading to an effect some health experts are colloquially calling “Zoom dysmorphia.” As Zoom meetings and other video-based interactions become increasingly common and in-person interactions grow rarer, we’re spending a lot more time staring at people’s faces — and realizing that they’re spending an equal amount of time seeing ours. Rates of self-image insecurity, BDD and mental health challenges are increasing, and our regularly scheduled online appearances may have something to do with it — so much so that “Zoom dysmorphia” was coined to describe the mental health effects we’re experiencing from looking at our perceived flaws on camera and wanting to change them. Whether you use Zoom for fun or for work, here’s what you need to know about the phenomenon.What Is Body Dysmorphia?BDD is a mental health condition that causes someone to become anxious about or obsessed with something they perceive is a physical flaw somewhere on their body. In some cases, the perceived flaw exists but is minor and other people don’t notice it. In other cases, the flaw is imagined and doesn’t exist at all. In both cases, someone with BDD believes the flaw is severely exaggerated. They then develop a “distressing preoccupation” with their physical appearance and the specific body part they focus on, notes the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. This obsession with the perceived flaw can cause someone with BDD to avoid social situations because they feel ashamed and anxious. Photo Courtesy: 10’000 Hours/DigitalVision/Getty Images According to the Cleveland Clinic, BDD sometimes occurs with other mental health conditions, such as eating disorders, anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder. BDD affects people of all genders and ages, and it typically arises in someone’s teens or early adult years. Because BDD is often comorbid with similar mental health issues, people who live with this disorder frequently develop compulsive behaviors involving their appearance. They might frequently look in mirrors or avoid mirrors altogether, or they may spend hours a day grooming themselves in an effort to minimize their perceived flaws, which they believe others will focus on.What Is Zoom’s Role in Body Dysmorphia?In an August 2020 Vogue article titled “How Staring at Our Faces on Zoom Is Impacting Our Self-Image,” Dr. Hilary Weingarden, a BDD expert at Massachusetts General Hospital, described some of the unique challenges that people with BDD have begun dealing with more frequently in the age of Zoom interactions. “We’re hearing that [patients are] becoming fixated on worrying about their own appearance during [a] call; getting stuck fixing their appearance for the call by changing their makeup, lighting or camera angle; and getting distracted during the call by comparing their appearance to others.” Photo Courtesy: Westend61/Getty Images While these Zoom-induced fixations are impacting people with BDD at worrying levels, they’re also affecting people who don’t have BDD but who still experience dissatisfaction with their appearance. This doesn’t mean that there’s something “wrong” with having a desire to put your best face forward during an online meeting. But this fixation can become harmful when it doesn’t subside. As it becomes more pervasive, focusing on your appearance during video conferences can lead to a distortion of your self-image and undermine your mental health. As Dr. Weingarden explains, “Over-focusing on your appearance for prolonged periods of time can actually distort your perceptions so that you’re no longer really seeing yourself clearly.” At its most mild, this “Zoom dysmorphia” can disrupt our focus a little during a meeting. But as it continues, it can cause us to experience increasingly negative emotions about ourselves — negative emotions that we internalize to a point that we feel the need to change our appearance.Plastic Surgery Is Also Experiencing an Unprecedented “Zoom Boom”Plastic surgeons in the United States and around the world have reported a spike in requests for surgical procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may relate to the increased use of Zoom. A December 2020 article in The Washington Post cited the experience of plastic surgeons in Cincinnati, Beverly Hills and New York who reported spikes in inquiries about and requests for Botox and Xeomin injectables and fillers to eliminate wrinkles, along with eyelid lifts, nose jobs, facelifts and procedures that focus on patients’ necks and jawlines. Photo Courtesy: Innocenti/Cultura/Getty Images Some of the surgeons attributed the requests to people paying more attention to their own appearance due to the use of Zoom. The Cincinnati-based plastic surgeon elaborated, noting, “During the virtual consultations, nine out of 10 people commented about noticing these things over Zoom.” However, the spike in demand has also been attributed to the fact that people who were already interested in plastic surgery had more time on their hands while isolating at home — where they had the option to heal privately. The “Zoom Boom” phenomenon isn’t entirely Zoom’s fault, nor is it totally COVID-19-related. A paper titled “A Pandemic of Dysmorphia: ‘Zooming’ Into the Perception of Appearance” noted that “72% of members of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery reported doctors were seeing patients who wanted plastic surgery to improve their appearance in selfies in pre-COVID 2019. The phenomenon was so significant that it was dubbed “Snapchat dysmorphia” in reference to that app’s feature-altering filters and users’ desire to look like filtered images of themselves. Unlike Snapchat and its wide array of filters, though, Zoom tends to give a more accurate picture of one’s true appearance — for better or worse. That might be one reason why the same paper reported a spike in Google searches for terms like “acne” and “hair loss” during the pandemic. Either way, the Zoom Boom appears to be an extension of a wave of digital-induced dysmorphic tendencies related to seeing ourselves on screens.Beating Zoom Gloom With These Tips for Boosting Your Mental HealthWhile social media apps and video-conferencing platforms can have negative effects on users’ mental health and self-image, they’re also essential for helping us connect with friends, family and coworkers during this stressful time. Being intentional and careful about using these technologies is important, but quitting them altogether could be harmful in entirely different ways. Here are a few tips psychotherapist Dr. Annette Nunez and social worker Alyssa Mancao shared with MindBodyGreen about using Zoom in a way that protects your self-image: Photo Courtesy: Westend61/Getty Images The quickest and simplest solution? Turn off the camera. If no one else can see you, you may be less concerned about your appearance and the way you look to others. Leave your camera on, but cover your own image on the screen with a sticky note. It’ll keep you from examining yourself so closely and encourage you to engage with everyone else instead. Develop some positive affirmations to support yourself. Use them in what psychotherapist Annette Nunez calls “mirror work.” This involves looking at your reflection in a mirror and repeating positive statements about yourself several times a day. If you notice negative thoughts at the end of a Zoom meeting, write them down so you can understand any thought patterns that are affecting you. Identifying them might help you to understand them and even bring them under control. Are you jumping onto a Zoom call? Don’t spend your last few minutes before the call scrolling through social media. Seeing filtered photos of other people and comparing yourself to them can impact your mood. MORE FROM ASK.COM

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