

## Beating BDD Episode 38

Just a couple of years ago, Malise was in a wheelchair after spending three and a half years in hospital being misunderstood and mistreated. Today she is in recovery, volunteering for the BDD Foundation and even training for the Manchester Marathon. She shares the devastating impact of misdiagnosis and how finally receiving the right support changed everything.

*“What you see isn’t the true version of who you are. BDD has taken over your brain.”*

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**Sponsor Malise on her marathon journey and raise money for the BDD Foundation! Visit:**

- [The BDD Foundation website](#)
  - [Malise’s JustGiving page](#)
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### How BDD first took hold

**[04:20]** Malise traces the start of her BDD back to age 14, when comments about her eyes made her feel abnormal and triggered intense self-consciousness. She began wearing extremely heavy makeup to hide what she believed was wrong with her appearance.

**[05:02]** Stress at school worsened her skin, intensifying the obsession. She avoided lessons with certain lighting and began skipping school.

**[05:36]** At the time she believed this level of distress about appearance was normal for a teenage girl, so she didn’t initially realise she was experiencing a mental health condition.

### When the disorder began to take over

**[06:12]** Most of Malise’s days were spent seeking reassurance, checking mirrors and Googling treatments, medications and cosmetic procedures, desperately trying to solve what she believed was a skin problem.

**[06:37]** She came across BDD while Googling but still believed that her skin was the problem and when it cleared up, she’d be fine.

**[07:03]** Looking in the mirror filled her with overwhelming disgust and distortion. She remembers feeling as though she didn’t belong in the world because of how she looked.

### School, isolation and early treatment attempts

**[08:00]** By age 15 Malise had dropped out of school and was being homeschooled because she could no longer leave the house. She was referred for CBT treatment but deteriorated significantly while waiting for it to start.

**[09:28]** The fixation intensified so much that daily functioning became impossible. By the time the therapy became available, she couldn’t attend more than a couple of sessions.

**[09:48]** Feelings of disgust eventually turned into a need for self-punishment, leading to self-harm and an attempt to end her life.

### 3+ years in hospital without the right treatment

**[10:12]** Malise was sectioned under the Mental Health Act and taken to hospital.

**[10:34]** Despite receiving an official diagnosis of BDD, she spent over three years moving between six hospitals without receiving specialist treatment.

**[10:52]** The trauma she experienced led her to develop functional neurological disorder (FND), including non-epileptic seizures and a lower-limb tremor that eventually left her unable to walk and reliant on a wheelchair.

### **Misdiagnosis and traumatic treatment**

[11:39] Instead of therapy for BDD, Malise was treated for conditions she didn't have.

[12:53] The hospital environment worsened her BDD symptoms, forcing her into situations where she felt constantly exposed.

[14:15] At one stage she was incorrectly treated for an eating disorder, including being force-fed through a tube and continually watched to make sure she didn't remove it. The distress and trauma led her to start having non-epileptic seizures.

### **Finally being heard**

[20:39] After years of hospitalisation, including being moved to a hospital over four hours from home, Malise's parents secured legal support and fought successfully for her discharge.

[21:41] An assessment with Professor David Veale confirmed that her condition was severe BDD and nothing else.

[23:29] Returning home was emotionally difficult, especially as she was now wheelchair-bound and still struggling with BDD symptoms. But she managed to get a place on the BDD Foundation's Overcoming BDD programme, which helped her massively.

### **Recovery and rebuilding her life**

[24:25] Malise's family is the main reason she's here today. Being surrounded by others with lived experience (on the programme) also created a sense of understanding and empathy she never experienced in hospital.

[25:43] Exposure therapy was one of the most challenging but powerful parts of her recovery, helping her face situations she had previously avoided.

[28:01] While on the programme, Malise started having physiotherapy to learn to walk again. Now, she's a support worker and a volunteer for the BDD Foundation's email helpline. She's also preparing to run the Manchester Marathon and treating the training as exposure therapy.

[37:39] Malise's message to listeners is that what you see in the mirror isn't the true version of who you are. Once you realise it's the BDD talking, you're one step closer to recovery and getting your life back.

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## **Resources**

- **The BDD Foundation:** [bddfoundation.org](http://bddfoundation.org)

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## **Sponsors**

Thank you to our champion sponsor **JAAQ (Just Ask a Question)** – the new mental health platform designed to give you the right information, from the right people, in a way that's never been done before.

Thank you also to our community sponsors:

- **Nightingale Hospital** – a private mental health hospital located in central London. It provides specialist treatment for OCD, BDD and related disorders in its dedicated inpatient unit and day programme.
- **Orri** – a specialist eating disorder treatment service providing compassionate, multidisciplinary care through tailored outpatient, day care and online programmes.
- **Blondes Fine Art** – a fine art dealership based in Hertfordshire and proud to support *Beating BDD*.