

## **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

**Definition:** The American Psychiatric Association defines Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) as the presence of obsessions, compulsions, or both. Children and adults with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) suffer from unwanted and intrusive thoughts that they can't seem to get out of their heads (obsessions), often compelling them to repeatedly perform ritualistic behaviors and routines (compulsions) to try and ease their anxiety.

Most people who have OCD are aware that their obsessions and compulsions are irrational, yet they feel powerless to stop them.

**Symptoms:** People with OCD sometimes spend hours at a time performing complicated rituals to ward off persistent, unwelcome thoughts, feelings, or images.

Examples of obsessions (unwanted, intrusive thoughts) may include:

- Constant, irrational worry about dirt, germs, or contamination.
- Excessive concern with order, arrangement, or symmetry.
- Fear that negative or aggressive thoughts or impulses will cause personal harm or harm to a loved one.
- Preoccupation with losing or throwing away objects with little or no value.
- Excessive concern about accidentally or purposefully injuring another person.
- Feeling overly responsible for the safety of others.
- Distasteful religious and sexual thoughts or images.
- Doubting that is irrational or excessive.

Examples of compulsions (ritualistic behaviors and routines to relieve anxiety or stress) may include:

- Cleaning — Repeatedly washing one's hands, bathing, or cleaning household items, often for hours at a time.
- Checking — Checking and re-checking several to hundreds of times a day that the doors are locked, the stove is turned off, the hairdryer is unplugged, etc.
- Repeating — Inability to stop repeating a name, phrase, or simple activity (such as going through a doorway over and over).

- Hoarding — Difficulty throwing away useless items such as old newspapers or magazines, bottle caps, or rubber bands.
- Touching and arranging
- Mental rituals — Endless reviewing of conversations, counting; repetitively calling up “good” thoughts to neutralize “bad” thoughts or obsessions; or excessive praying and using special words or phrases to neutralize obsessions.

**Causes:** Despite a lot of research, a cause for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder has not been identified. However, OCD is believed to be triggered by a combination of neurological, genetic, behavioral, and environmental factors. Studies have shown that OCD can run in families.

**Treatment:** Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a serious, yet treatable anxiety disorder that often appears with other types of anxiety disorders, such as depression. Successful treatment usually includes a combination of behavior therapy, such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), exposure and response prevention (ERP) therapy, and medication. Treatment needs to be individualized especially if there are other anxiety disorders present.

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