

PATIENT EDUCATION

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

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What is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder?

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a disorder characterized by constant bothering thoughts (obsessions) and/or repetitive behaviors (compulsions) that are excessive and time consuming (occur more than an hour a day). These obsessions and compulsions cause significant distress in a person's life and affect his/her functioning.
- OCD can occur in children, adolescents, or adults.
- Symptoms usually begin gradually and worsen with time. They are sometimes induced by stressful events.

What are obsessions?

- **Obsessions** are unreasonable and persistent thoughts or feelings that are disturbing and unwanted.
- Obsessions can also be mental images rather than just thoughts.
- Unlike any other thought, an obsession can cause high levels of anxiety.
- Obsessions are difficult to ignore or suppress. They can lead a person with OCD to do repetitive or unreasonable actions (compulsions).

Common obsessions in OCD:

- Fear of contamination (contracting germs/diseases, body fluids such as urine and feces, dirt, household chemicals)
- Fear of losing control (harming oneself, harming others, acting on violent mental images, insulting others)
- Religious obsessions (excessive worry regarding morality or regarding offending God or behaving sinfully)
- Unwanted sexual thoughts
- Excessive fear or concern about having a physical illness
- Excessive and exaggerated superstitious thoughts

What are compulsions?

- **Compulsions** are repetitive behaviors or mental acts that a person with OCD feels forced to perform over and over again to relieve the anxiety caused by the obsessive thought.
- They are usually excessive in nature and are not a realistic way of reducing or preventing the anxiety.

Common compulsions in OCD:

- **Washing and cleaning**
 - Excessive handwashing
 - Excessive showering or shower rituals
 - Excessive cleaning of household items
 - Excessive or irrational behaviors to prevent contamination
- **Double-checking**
 - Checking repeatedly door locks, car locks, electricity
 - Checking repeatedly that nothing bad has happened
 - Checking repeatedly body parts to ensure personal safety or lack of disease or symptoms
 - Checking that no harm has been done to one's self or others
- **Repeating**
 - Repeating activities multiple times
 - Repeating body movements (tapping, blinking, etc.)
 - Rereading/rewriting
- **Mental compulsions**
 - Overthinking
 - Praying to prevent the obsession
 - Counting
- **Arranging and re-arranging items** in a specific order multiple times.
- **Seeking reassurance**

What are the causes of OCD?

There is no single cause for OCD.

- OCD might be triggered by a dysfunction in the brain chemicals.
- Environmental factors and stressors put the person at a higher risk of having OCD.
- Heredity might play a role too. Family members are at a higher risk to develop OCD than others especially if they are also affected by environmental stressors.

What are the different types of OCD?

There are several types of OCD.

- **Contamination** is the need to clean repeatedly with the fear that something negative will happen in case you didn't do so.
- **Symmetry and orderliness** is the need to repeatedly order items in a specific manner.
- **Checking and repeating.**
- **Intrusive repetitive thoughts.**
- **Hoarding** is the difficulty to discard useless possessions away. The feeling is coupled with anxiety when an attempt is made to get rid of the possessions. It has a great impact on the individual's quality of life. It can lead to anxiety and depression and can cause health and safety risks.

Is there a treatment for OCD?

Yes. The treatment may not result in a cure but can help control the symptoms of OCD. OCD is sometimes coupled with other types of anxiety disorders that make it more difficult to diagnose and treat. There are several effective treatments for OCD. These treatments might be used alone or in combination to achieve the best results.

Treatment differs from one individual to another; some patients are more receptive to medication while others improve with psychotherapy. Often treatment is most effective for individuals with a combination of both.

If left untreated, OCD can be disruptive to one's daily life. It can contribute to other mental health problems such as depression and may lead to suicide.

The common treatments of OCD include:

- **Medical treatment**

- A variety of medications, specifically anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications, are used to help control the obsessions and compulsions of OCD. Always make sure to take your medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor.
- Medications may usually take up to several weeks before you notice an improvement.
- Medications may have mild side effects on some people; but these may only be temporary and will disappear after a while. Make sure to inform your doctor if you are experiencing any side effects.

- **Psychological treatment**

- It is a process in which a mental health professional discusses with you possible strategies that help you understand and deal with your OCD.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is a common psychological treatment used for OCD. It helps you recognize and change your obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors.
- Exposure and response prevention (ERP) slowly exposes you to the feared object and helps you find effective ways to cope with your anxiety.

- **Brain stimulation**

- Deep brain stimulation (DBS) is a new brain stimulation procedure. **Please refer to the "DBS" handout for more information.**

- **Lifestyle changes**

- Treating OCD depends to a great extent on your ability to distract yourself from obsessive thoughts and engage in healthier and more productive activities. Ruminating over your obsessions and isolating yourself will only increase the severity of OCD.
- **Do not let OCD affect your daily routine. Instead, change your lifestyle and engage in the below:**
 - Exercise.
 - Improve your nutrition.
 - Regulate your sleep.
 - Reduce your stress by meditating or learning breathing exercises.
 - Hang out with friends and family members.
 - Join support groups.

How are family members affected by OCD?

- Living with someone who has OCD can become distressing, upsetting, and disruptive.
- As a family member, it is important to understand what the person is going through. This can be done through educating yourself about OCD and finding ways to help the person overcome it.
- There are several steps you can take to support the person dealing with OCD.
 - Encourage the person to talk about the disorder so you understand his/her feelings. However, be cautious not to engage with the person in talking about his/her specific obsessions. Responding to a person's obsessions only reinforces the OCD cycle.
 - Encourage the person to seek professional help.
 - Break the stigma associated with OCD by reinforcing the concept that mental illness is not a source of shame.
 - Encourage improvements, no matter how minute they might be.
 - Try to maintain normal routines and regular family gatherings such as birthdays in order to reinforce positive traditions.
 - If you find yourself under a lot of stress, take some time off and learn some relaxation techniques to help you cope.