

Obsessive Compulsive

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes obsessive compulsive disorder or OCD to be one of the top twenty most disabling illnesses in terms of lost income and diminished quality of life. OCD is an anxiety disorder most commonly characterized by obsessive, distressing, intrusive thoughts and related compulsions or behaviors, which the person uses in an attempt to neutralize the obsessions. These compulsions are repetitive behaviors or mental acts that the person feels driven to perform in a response to an obsession or to rigid rules, which are performed to prevent or reduce distress, or prevent some dreaded event or situation. People who suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder experience mental pre-occupation with small details that cannot be fixed or changed, and these obsessions and compulsions may be quite time consuming.

OCD often causes feelings similar to depression, and thoughts, impulses, or images are not simply excessive worries about real life problems, because these persons attempt to ignore or suppress such thoughts as much as possible. People with obsessive compulsive disorder perform tasks or compulsions to seek relief from obsession related anxiety, caused by recurrent and persistent thoughts, impulses, or images that are experienced at some time during the disturbance as intrusive, inappropriate, and the cause of marked anxiety or distress. The sufferer feels that the task is critically important and must be performed in a particular way to ward off dire consequences. Examples of this are repeatedly checking that one's car is locked before leaving it, repeated hand washing at regular intervals throughout the day, turning lights on and off a set number of times before leaving a room, repeated clearing of the throat, specific counting systems, perfectly aligning objects, having the need to cancel out bad thoughts with good thoughts, fear of contamination by human secretions or other items, a need for both sides of the body to feel even, and more.

To be diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder, one must meet criteria set forth by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). For a patient to benefit from treatment, they must realize that the obsessions and/or compulsions are unreasonable and excessive. Possession of the above mentioned symptoms is not necessarily an absolute diagnosis. Treatment typically includes behavioral or cognitive therapy, medications, or a combination of the three. Psychotherapy in combination with psychotropic meds like selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors or SSRIs have proven to be more effective than either option alone. Continued research is uncovering new and improved treatments all the time to help people with obsessive compulsive disorder lead productive fulfilling lives. If you need help, consult a mental health professional in your area for a formal evaluation and a comprehensive treatment plan to get you back on your feet again.

