

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

Compulsive behaviours may include:

- Following a strict daily routine
- Not touching objects touched by others
- Excessive checking and rechecking things
- Repeatedly checking in on loved ones to make sure they are safe
- Counting, tapping, repeating certain words, or doing other senseless things to reduce anxiety
- Spending a lot of time washing hands or cleaning
- Needing to arrange things symmetrically and precisely
- Praying excessively or engaging in rituals triggered by religious fear
- Accumulating everything you have ever owned, including items that should be thrown away such as old newspapers or empty food containers^{2, 4, 11}

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours can become all-consuming and overwhelming, causing serious distress, impacting work, school and relationships.^{2, 3, 4}

While OCD is a chronic medical condition that cannot be cured, with the right treatment, it can be managed. Your doctor will likely recommend anxiety-reducing medication and refer you to specialised healthcare professional, a psychologist or psychiatrist for cognitive behavioural therapy. Therapy will help you to better understand your obsessions (thoughts) and compulsions (urges), and will help you to change your thoughts and behavioural patterns.

Remember, your obsessions and compulsions are symptoms of your OCD and not a personal flaw. While there is no cure, with the correct medical treatment and self-care, you can get it under control.

Please Note: This is an educational information leaflet only and should not be used for diagnosis. For more information on OCD, consult your healthcare professional.

References: **1.** International OCD Foundation. 5 Things OCD is not. Available at: <https://iocdf.org/blog/2013/03/01/5-things-ocd-is-not/>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **2.** Help Guide. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Available at: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd.html/>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **3.** National Institute of Mental Health. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Available at: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/index.shtml>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **4.** Mayo Clinic. Obsessive-compulsive disorder. Available at: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/obsessive-compulsive-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20354432>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **5.** Better Health Channel. Obsessive compulsive disorder. Available at: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/ConditionsAndTreatments/obsessive-compulsive-disorder>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **6.** Health Central. 8 Things You Might Not Know About OCD. Available at: <https://www.healthcentral.com/article/8-things-you-might-not-know-about-ocd>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **7.** The South African Depression and Anxiety Group. OCD Treatment & Referral Guide. Available at: http://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1831&Itemid=169. Accessed 13 May 2019. **8.** Medical News Today. What is obsessive-compulsive disorder? Available at: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/178508.php>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **9.** Brain Blogger. Multifaceted Causes of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Available at: <http://www.brainblogger.com/2013/07/13/multifaceted-causes-of-obsessive-compulsive-disorder/>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **10.** Beyond OCD. What causes OCD? Available at: <http://beyondocd.org/ocd-facts/what-causes-ocd>. Accessed 13 May 2019. **11.** Psych Guides. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Symptoms, Causes and Effects. Available at: <https://www.psychguides.com/ocd/symptoms-causes-and-effects/>. Accessed 13 May 2019.



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OCD

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

Ever heard someone casually refer to themselves as OCD because they like their home to be spotlessly clean and neat or like to do things in a precise and orderly way? Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD is often misunderstood. The term is often misused as a synonym for uptight, fussy, hard to please, overly neat, or too precise.¹

WHAT IS OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

OCD is a serious anxiety disorder characterised by uncontrollable, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and ritual behaviours that sufferers feel the need to repeat over and over (compulsions).^{2,3}

Unlike someone who is particular about personal hygiene or safety and security, a person with OCD may repeatedly wash their hands. Likewise, they might spend so much time checking and rechecking if their front door is locked that they may be late for work regularly.

OCD is about anxiety not logic

A typical OCD cycle = Obsessive thought → Anxiety → Compulsive behavior → Temporary Relief²

People who have OCD likely know that their obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours do not make sense.² However, they cannot just snap out of it or get over it.^{1,2,4} Feeling powerless to resist or control their obsessions and compulsions, they may try to disguise or hide them from others to not seem odd or crazy.^{5,6}



Someone with OCD may repeatedly wash their hands until the skin is red or raw, but they get no pleasure or satisfaction from it. Repetitive scrubbing is a way to temporarily stop the anxiety that comes from what they think may happen if they do not wash their hands frequently.

People with OCD tend to fall into 4 categories:

- **Washers** fear contamination from people or things they touch (dirt, germs, diseases) and usually have cleaning or hand washing compulsions
- **Checkers** repeatedly check things they connect with harm or danger (stove, taps and light switches turned off, doors locked)
- **Doubters and sinners** believe something terrible will happen or they will be punished if everything is not done perfectly
- **Hoarders** collect, keep and store things they do not need or use, fearing something bad will happen if they throw anything away

WHAT CAUSES OCD AND WHO GETS IT?

While the causes of OCD are not fully understood, it may be the result of genetics, cognitive, and environmental factors.^{7,9,10}

- **Genetics.** OCD tends to run in families
- **Cognitive.** Chemical, structural and functional abnormalities in the brain may play a role
- **Environment.** Beliefs about things that are not true can reinforce and maintain the behaviours associated with OCD.^{9,10}

OCD occurs in males and females. While it can develop at any age, it tends to first appear between the age of 8 and 12 or between late teens and early adulthood.¹



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Signs and symptoms can come and go, and may ease over time or get worse.^{3,4} While most people with OCD have both obsessions and compulsions, it is possible for someone to have one or the other.²

Obsessive thoughts may include:

- Extreme fear of being contaminated by germs or dirt, or contaminating others
- Fear of losing control together with aggressive or horrific thoughts about harming yourself or others
- Disturbing, intrusive sexual or violent thoughts and images
- Excessive focus on religious or moral ideas
- Fear of losing or not having things you might need
- Excessive beliefs about perfection, order and symmetry – the idea that everything must line up perfectly
- Superstitious beliefs such as walking on cracks on a pathway will cause harm to yourself or others^{2,4,11}