

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a mental illness. People with this illness worry constantly that something is very wrong or check and recheck something over and over again. Below are some examples of OCD behaviors.

A person worries that their hands are not clean and covered with germs. They wash and rewash their hands many times throughout the day.

A person drives to work and has intense thoughts that someone is going to break into their house. They immediately return home to be sure their doors are locked. Again and again the thoughts recur and they have to return home many times to recheck that the doors are secure. Daily, they have to leave home several hours before the work day begins, to prevent being late.

A person calls their veterinarian every day, worried that their dog has fleas. They have intense fears that their house will be overrun with fleas and spend four hours a day brushing, bathing their pet and checking and rechecking their fur.

What are the symptoms of OCD?

The symptoms of OCD are called obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are repeated, unwanted and disturbing thoughts. These thoughts are often related to cleanliness or safety for self or others. The person with OCD may fear bacteria and dirt, violent acts done by others or themselves, immorality, or a religious routine.

Compulsions are repeated actions done to release intense feelings of anxiety. These actions are often referred to as rituals. Repeated actions may include washing ones hands, gathering and organizing useless or unneeded objects, counting things or the number of times an action is repeated.

People with OCD understand that their thoughts are not based on reality, yet at the same time they worry that their thoughts are real. People experiencing the intense feeling of this illness constantly doubt and question what is real, possible or impossible. Their compulsions are repeated over and over in the attempt to stop the intense doubt, anxiety and worry. These unwanted thoughts and actions are uncontrollable, and are not in any way enjoyable.

The rituals allow brief periods of relief. Often these rituals can take hours and interfere with daily living. People with this illness usually hide their problems from friends and co-workers and do not often seek professional help. OCD symptoms often occur before adolescence begins and can worsen over time.

Who gets OCD?

Approximately 2% of the population has been diagnosed with OCD. It strikes people from all walks of life, both males and females from all ethnic groups. That means that 1 out of every 40 people will have this illness during their life time.

The exact cause of this disease is unknown, but it is related to the brain's chemical imbalance or injury. OCD tends to occur repeatedly in families. If a mother or father has the disorder, there is a 25% chance that their children will have symptoms also. Stress in one's environment is a contributing factor.

What is the treatment for OCD?

OCD treatment begins by talking with your doctor about your worries and concerns. Behavior therapy and medication can reduce the obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors. Your doctor will discuss what treatment is best for you.

Response to treatment varies from person to

person. Work with your physician and allow 10 to 12 weeks of continuous treatment to determine how well your medication and therapy are working. Most people treated will feel a 40-50% improvement and are able to function better at home and at work.

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