

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

What is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is one of several types of anxiety disorders. It is characterised by repetitive thoughts and actions that the sufferer finds distressing. The actions are compulsive, unreasonable and irrational. For example, washing your hands at appropriate times is reasonable. But to feel compelled to keep on doing it incessantly is not.

Even when sufferers know that their actions are unreasonable, they still feel compelled to carry them out. If they do not, they suffer extreme anxiety, which is only quelled – and even then, only temporarily - by carrying out the action. The anxiety soon returns, compelling the person to carry out the action again. The need to constantly perform actions in a particular way turns them into rituals. These rituals have specific characteristics that must be followed exactly. If a mistake is made, the ritual must be performed again for it to be effective.

OCD actions often involve checking routines, such as checking light switches, locks, windows or stoves. There is often an obsession with cleanliness, leading to compulsive hand washing, showering or changing clothes. Actions must be completed within the right amount of time. Counting may be involved, such as counting objects, spaces, steps or the seconds that an action has to last.

Distress is compounded by the loss of time, usually hours in a day, lost by having to perform their obsessions. Work, relationships and health care usually suffer. Life's main focus is on serving the obsession, crippling the sufferer's emotional, intellectual and social development.

While similar to phobia, OCD differs in that the phobia sufferer only thinks about their feared object when they have to, whereas the OCD sufferer constantly thinks about their obsession. Similar (but a separate condition) is 'Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder,' characterised by obsession with perfection, order, rules, details, lists and mental and interpersonal control.

Like most anxiety disorders, OCD has multiple causes. Biological, behavioural, cognitive and environmental factors could be involved. Biological factors could be the *brain not properly recognising that the required action has been performed* (e.g. washing hands to remove germs) and so sends out the signal to do it again. Behavioural factors concern the compulsion to continue behaviours as *they don't produce the desired result*. Cognitive factors concern the *faulty beliefs* about the need to continually perform the actions. Environmental factors could involve *not coping well with stress caused by something happening at the time*. Many of these ideas are still speculative.

Treatment for OCD

OCD can be treated. While prescribed medication may relieve anxiety symptoms, appropriate therapy is needed for long term or permanent recovery. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) encourages sufferers to examine and appraise the faulty beliefs that are driving their condition, and change them for more realistic ones. Exposure therapy, in which they learn to experience and overcome the distressing feelings without performing the ritual actions is also likely to be carried out. Mindfulness training teaches how to manage the distressing feelings caused by the compulsion.

Mindfulness-integrated-Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (MiCBT), which incorporates behaviour, cognitive and environmental factors is ideal for treating OCD. To know more, get in touch below.

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