

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Factsheet



What is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder?

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder consisting of recurring and unwanted obsessive thoughts and/or repetitive and compulsive actions and behaviours. OCD can vary in its severity and impact and can sometimes result in very high levels of anxiety and distress. OCD can also take up a considerable amount of time and attention for both, the sufferer and their family and/or friends. OCD is believed to affect between 1.9 to 3% of young people and can affect people from any social class, ethnicity or background.

Main symptoms of OCD?

Some of the most common signs to look out for regarding whether someone is experiencing OCD can include (although are not limited to):

- Particular and repetitive behaviours (e.g. the tidying of a room in a certain way or the recurrent lining up of certain items)
- Repetitive hand washing
- Prolonged showering/bathing
- Excessive worry about handwriting and/or neatness of handwriting
- Excessive worry about possible harm coming to loved ones
- Repeated checking of things (e.g. door locks, windows, taps, gas hobs)
- Repeated counting and distress when interrupted
- Excessive worry about illness or disease
- Hoarding of items and/or refusal to discard seemingly useless items

Related disorders

- Skin Pricking Disorder (Excoriation)
- Hair-Pulling Disorder (trichotillomania)
- Body Dysmorphic Disorder

Treatment for OCD

Choosing a course treatment for OCD depends on several factors, including: What has worked in the past, attitudes toward medication, exposure response prevention (ERP) or cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), severity of symptoms, presence of other disorders such as depression.

In general, most OCD types respond to some combination of cognitive-behaviour therapy, exposure-response prevention, and medication. An important exception may be hoarding, which does not seem to improve with medication but does seem to respond to psychotherapy.

5 Symptom Subtypes of OCD

Specific symptom types may be stable over time but it's possible to experience a change in the nature and focus of symptoms. While the majority might be consistent with a particular symptom subtype, it's possible to experience multiple symptoms types.

1. Contamination obsessions with washing/cleaning compulsions
2. Harm obsessions with checking compulsions
3. Obsessions without visible compulsions – obsessive thoughts or thought rituals
4. Symmetry obsessions with ordering, arranging, and counting compulsions
5. Hoarding, often accompanied by obsessional fears of losing items or possessions

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What is hoarding?

The compulsion to continually accumulate a variety of items that are often considered useless or worthless by others accompanied by an inability to discard the items without great distress to such a point that the collections cause stress and start impacting a person's health, career or relationships. People justify hoarding as curating and recycling, deeming odd objects beautiful and useful.

Symptoms & behaviour

- Inability to throw away possessions
- Severe anxiety when attempting to discard items
- Great difficulty categorizing or organizing possessions
- Indecision about what to keep or where to put things
- Distress, such as feeling overwhelmed or embarrassed by possessions
- Suspicion of other people touching items
- Obsessive thoughts and actions: fear of running out of an item or of needing it in the future; checking the trash for accidentally discarded objects
- Functional impairments, including loss of living space, social isolation, family or marital discord, financial difficulties, health hazards

Reasons for hoarding

People hoard because they believe that an item will be useful or valuable in the future. Or they feel it has sentimental value, is unique and irreplaceable, or too big a bargain to throw away. They may also consider an item a reminder that will jog their memory, thinking that without it they won't remember an important person or event. Or because they can't decide where something belongs, it's better just to keep it.

Hoarding is a disorder that may be present on its own or as a symptom of another disorder. Those most often associated with hoarding are obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and depression. May be associated with Pica (eating non-food materials), Prader-Willi syndrome (a genetic disorder), psychosis, or dementia.

A hoarding disorder is where someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value.

Hoarding is considered a significant problem if:

- The amount of clutter interferes with everyday living – for example, the person is unable to use their kitchen or bathroom and cannot access rooms
- The clutter is causing significant distress or negatively affecting the quality of life of the person or their family – for example, they become upset if someone tries to clear the clutter and their relationship suffers