

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

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Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder. It usually begins in late childhood or early adolescence. You may have:

- obsessions: repeated thoughts, images or impulses that are unwanted and interfere with life
- compulsions: rituals, behaviors or actions that are repeated to make disturbing thoughts go away.

Obsessive Thoughts

Obsessions usually come from normal concerns and worries that get out of control. They can cause anxiety or distress. Common obsessions include:

- fear of germs
- doubts you have locked the door or turned off the stove
- intense distress when objects are not in order or facing the right way
- disturbing thoughts about hurting someone
- urge to shout obscenities in inappropriate situations.

Compulsive Behaviors

Compulsions are behaviors that are done over and over to prevent or reduce anxiety or distress because of an obsession.

For example, if you think someone will break into your house, you may return several times to lock the door because of your doubt. You may also make up rules or rituals to follow that help control anxiety felt when having obsessive thoughts.

Common compulsions may include:

- repeated cleaning (washing hands until your skin becomes raw)
- repeated checking (making sure doors are locked or the stove is turned off)
- repeated counting
- putting things in order or arranging things over and over (making sure all canned goods face the same way).

If you have OCD, you know what you are doing does not make sense but you cannot stop. You may try to hide the problem. You may have trouble keeping a job or maintaining relationships.

It is time to get treatment if these thoughts and behaviors are interfering with relationships, work or getting places on time. OCD is a long-lasting (chronic) disease that can get worse without treatment.

Treatment

OCD is usually treated with exposure or cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT). Talk with your health care provider if your obsessions and compulsions are affecting the quality of your life, and which therapies may be best for you.