



OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE AND RELATED DISORDERS

OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER

What it is:

Obsessive-compulsive disorder, also known as OCD, is characterised by both obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are repetitive thoughts, images or urges that an individual experiences. (For example, constant thoughts of germs or contamination present everywhere you go.) These obsessions are not voluntarily, and typically they cause the individual experiencing them great anxiety. The individual then tries to suppress these obsessions through compulsive behaviours. Compulsions are repetitive behaviours, or mental acts, that the individual feels compelled to perform in response to an obsession. (For example, compulsively washing your hands and ensuring surfaces are free from germs.) The aim of the compulsion is to try and minimise the distress caused by the obsessive thought, or to prevent the feared event that will happen if the compulsive action is not performed. Compulsions are not something an individual does for pleasure, although they can help to minimise anxiety or distress. Obsessions and compulsions must be time consuming and/or cause impairment to functionality in order to warrant a diagnosis of OCD.

Common symptoms:

1. The presence of obsessions, compulsions, or both
2. Obsessions – Recurrent thoughts, urges or images that are unwanted and disturbing, and cause the individual anxiety or distress. The individual tries to suppress or ignore these thoughts, urges or images or to control them through some sort of action (by performing a compulsion)
3. Compulsions – Repetitive behaviours or mental acts that the individual feels compelled to do in response to an obsession or according to rigid rules. These behaviours or mental acts are performed in an attempt at preventing or reducing anxiety or prevent some negative event
4. The obsessions or compulsions are time consuming in that they take up more than 1 hour of the individuals time a day
5. The obsession or compulsion causes impairment in everyday functionality



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Causes:

A number of factors can contribute to the development of obsessive compulsive behaviours. Temperamental risk factors include internalising symptoms, negative emotionality and behavioural inhibition. Environmental risk factors can include sexual or physical abuse in childhood or other traumatic or stressful life events. Genetic and physiological factors also play a role. First degree relatives of an individual with OCD are two times more likely to develop the disorder. Dysfunctions in the orbitofrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex and the striatum have all also been associated with the disorder.