

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)



What is OCD?

OCD is an anxiety-related condition where someone experiences recurrent obsessions and/or compulsions that are severe enough to cause distress and can interfere with areas of life such as work, education, social life and personal relationships.

Symptoms

The symptoms of OCD are obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are persistent and uncontrollable thoughts, images, impulses, worries, fears or doubts. They are often intrusive (cause disruption and annoyance), unwanted and can be frightening for the person experiencing them.

People with OCD will often recognise that these obsessional thoughts are irrational, but this doesn't necessarily help to control them. Common obsessions that affect people with OCD include: worrying about the safety of others or worrying that everything needs to be arranged symmetrically so that it is 'just right'.

Compulsions are purposeful behaviours and actions that are performed in an attempt to relieve the anxiety caused by obsessional thoughts. Often the behaviour is carried out according to certain rules, or will be performed as a ritual. Relief provided by compulsions are only temporary and often reinforce the original obsession. Common compulsions include: checking, counting and touching.

The condition affects both children and adults and it is estimated that as many as 12 in every 1,000 people are affected by OCD in the UK.

OCD and Tourette Syndrome (TS)

It is thought that approximately one-third of individuals with TS experience recurrent obsessive compulsive symptoms. (Khalifa and von Knorring 2005; Leckman et al. 1997)

Characteristics of tic-related OCD are:

- More common in males than females
 - Earlier age of onset of tics and OCD symptoms
 - Poorer level of response to anti-OCD medication
 - Increased likelihood of family history
- (Chowdhury and Murphy 2017)

It can be difficult to tell the difference between a compulsion and a compulsive tic. A compulsion is typically a behaviour that is carried out in an attempt to relieve anxiety that is caused by an intrusive or obsessional thought. A compulsive tic is more associated with a physical sensation, and needs to be performed to relieve the urge sensation.

Managing OCD

Treatment for OCD has been well researched and evidence suggests that early intervention promotes a more successful outcome. Available treatment includes psychoeducation (which helps a person better understand their condition and feel in control of it), Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and medication. These treatments may be combined or used singularly.

If you think you or your child may have OCD the first step is to contact your GP to discuss your symptoms. A GP can make a referral to a specialist, if needed, for diagnosis and treatment.

For more information and support you can contact the following organisations:

OCD-UK – a national charity supporting children and adults who are affected by OCD

www.ocduk.org
0845 120 3778

OCD Action – a national charity supporting children and adults who are affected by OCD

www.ocdaction.org.uk
0845 390 6232

Young Minds – a national charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people

www.youngminds.org.uk
0808 802 5544

References

Khalifa, N. and von Knorring, A.L. (2005)
Tourette Syndrome and other tic disorders in a total population of children: Clinical assessment and background.

Acta Paediatrica 94, 11, 1608–1614

Chowdhury, U. and Murphy, T. 2017.
Tic Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.