



## The Facts About Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) affects 2.2 million American adults and strikes men and women with equal frequency.
- OCD is identified by uncontrollable obsessions and compulsions, which the sufferer usually realizes are excessive or unreasonable. These persistent, recurring thoughts and actions reflect exaggerated anxieties or fears. In order for OCD to be diagnosed, the obsessions and/or compulsions must occur for at least one hour every day, and must interfere with normal routines, occupational functioning, social activities, or relationships.
- One third of adults with OCD had their first symptoms in childhood. However, unlike adults, children with OCD often do not realize that their behaviors, most likely the washing, checking, and ordering type, are excessive.

### Obsessions

Obsessions are persistent thoughts that are disturbing or inappropriate and cause the sufferer anxiety. Some common obsessions include:

- Fear of contamination or coming in contact with dirt or germs
- Persistent doubts, for example, whether or not one has turned off the stove
- Excessive need for orderliness
- Aggressive impulses or thoughts; for example, being overcome with the urge to yell "fire" in a crowded theater

These obsessions may lead an individual to perform an action or ritual (compulsion) in order to relieve their anxiety.

### Compulsions

Compulsions are repetitive behaviors used to counteract the unease caused by the anxiety of obsessive thoughts. Some of the most common compulsions are:

- **Cleaning.** Those concerned with contamination and germs tend to clean constantly, repeatedly washing their hands, showering, or cleaning their homes.
- **Checking.** Individuals may check several or even hundreds of times to make sure that stoves are turned off and doors are locked.
- **Repeating.** Some repeat a name, phrase, or action over and over.
- **Slowness.** Some sufferers take a methodically slow approach to daily activities. They may spend hours organizing and arranging.
- **Hoarding.** Hoarders are unable to throw away useless items, such as old newspapers, junk mail, or even broken appliances, sometimes filling whole rooms with saved items.