

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder



The Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety and anxiety-related disorders and to improve the lives of all people who suffer from them. Help ADAA help others. Donate now at www.adaa.org.

For information visit www.adaa.org or contact

Anxiety Disorders Association of America
8730 Georgia Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Phone: 240-485-1001

“ Once I get into the shower I can't seem to get out. Sometimes it takes over an hour. I use a whole bar of soap. What's wrong with me? ”

What Is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)?

We all have habits and routines that help us stay clean, healthy, and safe. We wash our hands before eating. We lock the doors and turn off the oven before leaving the house. And we may hum a favorite song while working, read before bedtime, or lay out our clothes for the next day as comforting rituals.

But people with obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, experience unwanted and intrusive thoughts (obsessions), which cause them to repeatedly perform ritualistic behaviors and routines (compulsions) to ease their anxiety. Some spend hours at a time performing complicated rituals involving hand washing, counting, or checking to ward off persistent unwelcome thoughts, feelings, or images. Others live in terror that they will accidentally harm someone, blurt out an improper statement, throw out something by mistake, or do something else wrong. They realize that their seemingly uncontrollable behavior is irrational, but they feel unable to stop it.

What are common obsessions and compulsions?

Obsessions

- Constant, irrational worry about dirt, germs, or contamination
- Excessive concern with order, arrangement, or symmetry
- Fear that negative or blasphemous thoughts or impulses will cause personal harm or harm to a loved one
- Preoccupation with losing or throwing away objects with little or no value
- Distasteful religious and sexual thoughts or images

Compulsions

- Cleaning – Repeatedly washing hands, bathing, or cleaning household items
- Checking – Checking and re-checking several to hundreds of times a day that the doors are locked, stove is turned off, hairdryer is unplugged, etc.
- Repeating – Unable to stop repeating a name, phrase, or activity
- Touching and arranging
- Hoarding – Difficulty discarding useless items such as old newspapers or magazines, bottle caps, or rubber bands
- Mental rituals – Endless reviewing of conversations, counting, or praying to neutralize obsessions

About Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a normal part of living. It's the body's way of telling us something isn't right. It keeps us from harm's way and prepares us to act quickly in the face of danger. But for some people, anxiety is persistent, irrational, and overwhelming. It may interfere in daily activities or even

make them impossible. This may be a sign of an anxiety disorder.

The term "anxiety disorders" describes a group of conditions that includes generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias. For more information, visit www.adaa.org.

How can OCD affect your life?

Obsessions and rituals can interfere substantially with a regular routine of schoolwork, job, family, or social activities. Several hours each day may be spent on obsessive thoughts and performing seemingly senseless rituals, making concentrating on daily activities very difficult. People with OCD may go to great lengths to hide their behavior, even from friends and loved ones. Left untreated, OCD may follow a progressive course that can become disabling.

What causes OCD?

The disorder appears to run in families and may have a genetic link. Scientists have discovered that people with OCD and their close family members have distinctive patterns in brain structure, specifically regions associated with suppressing responses and habits.

Can children have OCD?

Yes, this disorder does occur in children. It is not surprising when a child with one or both parents who have OCD begins to show symptoms. OCD can make it difficult for a child to complete homework, household chores, and other tasks. Relationships with peers, siblings, and parents can become strained or problematic. In addition, children with OCD are prone to headaches, stomachaches, and other stress-related ailments.

What treatments are available?

Most people who seek treatment for OCD and other anxiety disorders see significant improvement and enjoy a better quality of life. A variety of treatments are available: cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), exposure and response prevention (ERP), and medications. Successful treatment often includes a combination of therapy and medication. Find out more details about these treatments at www.adaa.org.

It is important to remember that what works for one person may not be the best option for another. Any course of treatment should be tailored to individual



“ I was so relieved when my doctor put a name to my problem. To discover that there are other people like me. To learn that there is hope. ”

needs. Ask your doctor to explain why a particular type of treatment is recommended for you, other available options, and what you can do for your successful recovery.

How can ADAA help you?

Suffering from OCD or any anxiety disorder can interfere with many aspects of your life. ADAA provides resources to help you and your loved ones better understand anxiety disorders and connections to people with similar experiences. Visit the ADAA website (www.adaa.org) to locate mental health professionals in your area who treat OCD and other anxiety disorders, as well as local support groups. Learn about the causes, symptoms, and treatment options for anxiety disorders; review questions to ask a therapist or doctor; and purchase helpful books. ADAA is here to help you make good decisions so you can get on with your life.

Take Five & Manage Your Anxiety

*You are not alone. Talk to someone. Get help.
Anxiety disorders are real, serious, and treatable.*

Whether you have normal anxiety or an anxiety disorder, these strategies will help you cope:

1 Exercise. Go for a walk or jog. Do yoga. Dance. Just get moving!

2 Talk to someone... spouse, significant other, friend, child, or doctor.

3 Keep a daily journal. Become aware of what triggers your anxiety.

4 Eat a balanced diet. Don't skip meals. Avoid caffeine, which can trigger anxiety symptoms.

5 Visit ADAA at www.adaa.org. Let us help you help yourself.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Self-Test

If you think you might have OCD, take the test below. Answer "yes" or "no" to the questions and discuss the results with your doctor.

Yes or no?

- Y N Do you have unwanted ideas, images, or impulses that seem silly, nasty, or horrible?
- Y N Do you worry excessively about dirt, germs, or chemicals?
- Y N Are you constantly worried that something bad will happen because you forgot to lock the door or turn off appliances?
- Y N Are you afraid that you will act or speak aggressively when you really don't want to?
- Y N Are there things that you feel you must do excessively or thoughts that you must think repeatedly to feel comfortable?
- Y N Do you wash yourself or items around you excessively?
- Y N Do you have to check things over and over again or repeat them many times to be sure they are done properly?
- Y N Do you avoid situations or people you worry about hurting by aggressive words or deeds?
- Y N Do you keep many useless things because you feel that you can't throw them away?

Having more than one illness can make it difficult to diagnose and treat the different conditions. Depression and substance abuse are among the conditions that can complicate an anxiety disorder. The following information will help your health care professional evaluate you for OCD.

Yes or no? In the last year, have you experienced any of the following?

- Y N Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Y N Feeling sad or depressed more days than not
- Y N A lack of interest in life more days than not
- Y N A feeling of worthlessness or guilt more days than not
- Y N An inability to fulfill responsibilities at work, school, or family due to alcohol or drug use
- Y N A dangerous situation, such as driving under the influence, caused by alcohol or drug use
- Y N An arrest due to alcohol or drugs
- Y N The need to continue using alcohol or drugs despite it causing problems for yourself and your loved ones