

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is defined as a chronic persistent disorder where an individual has uncontrollable thoughts and behaviors that they feel they must continuously repeat. To an individual who has OCD, these repetitive thoughts and actions seem impossible to stop.



Signs & Symptoms

Symptoms are characterized by obsessions (thoughts) or compulsions (behaviors), and people can have several obsessions, compulsions, or both. Some individuals with OCD also have a tic disorder such as repetitive eye blinking, shoulder shrugging, repetitive throat-clearing, or sniffing. Symptoms of OCD can interfere with work, school, and personal relationships. Common signs of OCD include:

- Fear of germs/contamination or excessive handwashing and cleaning
- Arranging items in a very specific order
- Aggressive thoughts towards oneself or other
- Repeatedly checking on things (oven turned off, door is locked, etc.)
- Compulsive counting

Causes & Risk Factors

Obsessive compulsive disorder affects all age groups, but most people are diagnosed by age 19. The National Institute of Mental Health explains that OCD can be caused by changes in brain chemistry and function, genetic history, a traumatic or stressful experience, and other mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. Risk factors for developing OCD include, but are not limited to:

- Having an immediate relative who has OCD
- Trauma experiences (physical or sexual abuse)
- Certain infections or illnesses such as streptococcal infection

Diagnosis & Treatment

In order to diagnose an individual with obsessive compulsive disorder, a doctor or mental health professional will perform a physical exam and clinical assessment. Treatment plans consist of psychotherapy and/or a combination of psychotherapy and medication. Joining a support group and finding other healthy outlets have also been ways proven to help manage symptoms.

Sources – Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/obsessive-compulsive-disorder/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20354438> and National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/index.shtml>.