

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

Obsessions

Obsessions are unwelcome thoughts, images, urges or doubts that repeatedly appear in your mind and interrupt your regular thoughts.

They can feel quite real, be quite frightening and leave you feeling anxious. For example, you might think you've been contaminated by germs or experience a sudden urge to hurt someone.

Compulsions

Compulsions are repetitive activities that you feel you *have* to do. This could be something like repeatedly washing your hands or checking something. It could also be saying a phrase a certain number of times or until it 'feels right' to stop.

These behaviours are usually carried out to prevent something bad happening. Sometimes we might know what this is (eg being contaminated or a loved one getting hurt) but sometimes we don't.

Compulsions soothe the anxiety caused by the obsessions. However, the process of repeating these compulsions is often distressing and any relief is usually short-lived.

OCD and Coronavirus Covid-19

For people with OCD, the news around Coronavirus Covid-19 can be quite alarming. Although people have different obsessions, the fear of contamination is common and people with this obsession may see current news and advice as an affirmation that they are right to be fearful.

NHS advice to wash hands properly may lead those with OCD to wash their hands compulsively and fixate on the action. Similarly, being told to self-isolate can cause anxiety as it implies a serious situation. It's important to follow professional advice but not to let the media make your obsessions and compulsions worse.

Here are some tips that can help:

Top tips to help with OCD symptoms

- **Talk to someone:** Many people with OCD experience shame and loneliness and try to keep things secret. It is important not to bottle things up though, so try to talk to someone. If you're self-isolating, reach out to people via video chat or social media messaging.
- **Understanding:** Sometimes other people can get frustrated with people with OCD because it gets in the way of life. For example, the compulsions take time which make your family late for things. Try and learn about OCD together.
- **Tune into your thoughts:** Spotting unhelpful thoughts can help to challenge OCD.
- **Test yourself:** If you feel able to, with support you can start to find times when you are able to cope with places that you may usually avoid or reduce and ultimately stop your compulsions. These steps are important in moving forward from OCD. Face that fear!
- **Relaxation:** OCD is considered to be an anxiety condition, so the thought of trying some strategies to overcome OCD may increase some of your anxieties in the short-term. That's why it's important to know how to relax.

- Distract yourself: Busying yourself with jobs around the house or activities you enjoy can help take some focus away from any obsessive or compulsive thoughts.
- Professional help: If OCD is really getting in the way, you may need extra support from someone trained to help – this might include talking or behavioural therapy.