

Let's talk about...

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

MENTAL ILLNESS DEMYSTIFIED

HEALTHY PEOPLE WILL OFTEN HAVE PERSISTENT, REPETITIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT SOMETHING. THEY MAY ALSO HAVE RITUALS SUCH AS CHECKING SEVERAL TIMES TO SEE IF THE STOVE IS OFF BEFORE LEAVING THE HOUSE. HOWEVER, THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE PERSISTENT, UPSETTING THOUGHTS (OBSESSIONS) AND WHO USE RITUALS (COMPULSIONS) TO CONTROL THE ANXIETY THESE THOUGHTS PRODUCE. MUCH OF THE TIME, THESE RITUALS CONTROL THE PERSON. THIS PARTICULAR ANXIETY DISORDER IS KNOWN AS OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER. MANY FAMOUS PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED FROM VARIOUS FORMS OF THIS DISORDER OVER THE CENTURIES. SOME FAMILIAR NAMES INCLUDE: •CHARLES DARWIN •HOWARD HUGHES •ALBERT EINSTEIN •BILLY BOB THORNTON •JESSICA ALBA •HOWIE MANDEL.

People with OCD may be plagued by persistent, unwelcome thoughts or images, or by the urgent need to engage in certain rituals such as repeatedly checking things, touching things (especially in a certain sequence), or counting things. Some people are obsessive about germs or dirt and so they develop a compulsion to wash their hands over and over again, and become afraid to touch another person for fear of picking up germs. Other common obsessions include having frequent thoughts of violence and harming loved ones, having thoughts that are prohibited by religious beliefs, or disturbing sexual thoughts. People with OCD may also be preoccupied with order and symmetry, have difficulty throwing things out, or hoard unneeded items.

UNDERSTANDING OCD

It used to be thought that OCD was the result of family troubles or attitudes learned in childhood. It is now believed that, like other anxiety disorders, OCD has a neurological and genetic basis. It is generally described as a medical brain disorder that causes problems in information processing. It is not the person's fault or the result of a "weak" or

unstable personality. In OCD, the brain gets stuck on a particular thought or urge and the person just can't let go. People with OCD often say the symptoms feel like a case of mental hiccups that won't go away.

OCD can occur in people of all ages, but it generally begins before age 40 and it affects men and women equally. Studies show that the disorder usually begins during adolescence or early childhood.

People with OCD are under great stress. Performing rituals is not pleasant. At best, it produces temporary relief from the anxiety created by the obsessive thoughts. The intensity of symptoms varies – sometimes it is like background noise, and other times it can be a deafening roar. If OCD becomes severe, it can keep a person from working or carrying out normal responsibilities at home. People with OCD may try to help themselves by avoiding situations that trigger their obsessions, or they may use alcohol or drugs to calm themselves. Most individuals with OCD recognize that their obsessions are coming from their own minds and are not just excessive worries about real problems. They understand that the compulsions they perform are excessive or unreasonable, but nevertheless they continue.

TREATMENT

With early diagnosis and the right treatment, people can avoid the suffering that comes with OCD. They also have a greater chance of avoiding depression and relationship problems that often come with OCD.

Unfortunately, OCD tends to be under-diagnosed and under-treated because many people with this illness are ashamed and secretive about their symptoms. Effective treatments are available and research is finding new, improved therapies that can help most people with OCD and other anxiety disorders lead productive fulfilling lives.

Although OCD is usually completely curable only in some individuals, most people achieve meaningful and long-term symptom relief with comprehensive treatment

Recommended Reading. *The OCD Workbook: Your Guide to Breaking Free from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* by Bruce M. Hyman and Cherry Pedrick, New Harbinger Publications



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