



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

A photograph of a green tree with dense foliage, set against a clear blue sky, positioned on the left side of the page.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Help Yourself @ moodcafe.co.uk



This leaflet should be read alongside the leaflet “Understanding anxiety” also produced by Fife Psychology Department and available on moodcafé.co.uk.

What is obsessive-compulsive disorder?

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a psychological condition. It can develop when people have problems with anxiety.

There is no single cause of OCD. People from all walks of life, with different circumstances and with various personalities can all experience it.

About 2% of people have full-blown Obsessive-compulsive Disorder. But anyone with anxiety problems can have some obsessional thinking or compulsive behaviour. Likewise people with OCD can experience panic attacks and other symptoms of anxiety.

What are obsessions?

Obsessions are thoughts, ideas or images that won't go away. The person with them knows that the thoughts make no sense but cannot stop them. Even though they want to, people find that they simply cannot shut off the obsessional thoughts.

Common obsessional thoughts include worries:

- About dirt or being infected with germs;
- Of having a serious illness;
- Of causing an accident or harm to others;
- Of something violent happening or
- About security and safety.

People are frightened of their obsessions or feel guilty about having them. They try to put the thoughts out of their minds or do something to make them go away. The things that people do to try and get rid of obsessional thoughts are called compulsions.

What are compulsions?

Compulsions are impulses to do things.

These things can be:

- Performing certain actions (such as checking if doors are locked) and/or
- Carrying out certain mental acts (such as thinking or counting).

People do the compulsive behaviours to try to stop their obsessional thoughts. For example, some people have thoughts about being contaminated by germs. To lessen their fears, they might wash their hands over and over. Other people find that violent images keep coming into their head - images such as them hurting someone that they love. They might try to replace the violent images with images about their loved one being safe.

Compulsions are also called rituals. This is because the behaviours usually follow certain rules or are done in a rigid way. E.g. someone might feel that they must wash their hands 25 times after a thought about being contaminated. If they are interrupted after 20 washes, then they start again from zero.

The person with OCD knows that their behaviours (thoughts or actions) are unreasonable or are over the top. But he or she feels unable to control them.

The effects of obsessive-compulsive disorder

Many people feel troubled by having obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours that they cannot stop. They can feel anxious or miserable or depressed and can lose

confidence in themselves. Some people find that their compulsions/rituals can take up much of their time. The behaviours stop them being able to work properly and interfere with family or social activities. In short, their OCD begins to take over their life.

The development of obsessive-compulsive disorder

From time to time, anyone can have the type of thoughts that can develop into obsessions. E.g. imagining that you have upset or offended someone or that someone you love has had an accident. The difference between such one-off thoughts and an obsession is what the thought means to the person. Most people can say “it’s just a thought” and forget it. But people with obsessional problems become upset by the thought. They cannot forget it or ignore it. They try hard to push it out of their minds or start to do things to “put it right”. Unfortunately, this just makes the thoughts worse. OCD can then develop.

Overcoming OCD

Books that can help

Books on obsessions and compulsions:

- **Overcoming Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**, by D Veale & R Wilson
- **The OCD Workbook**, by C Pedrick & B Hyman

Books on anxiety:

- **Overcoming Anxiety** by H Kennerley
- **Overcoming Panic** by D Silove
- **Overcoming Panic, Anxiety & Phobias New Strategies to Free Yourself from Worry and Fear** by C Goldman & S Babior

These and other books are also available through the fife book prescription scheme.

More information is available at moodcafé - www.moodcafe.co.uk/books-that-can-help.aspx

Self-help leaflets/courses

- Living Life is a free telephone service that offers guided self-help. More information is available on the NHS 24 website - www.nhs24.com/UsefulResources/LivingLife
- There are leaflets that cover other types of anxiety disorders on moodcafé – www.moodcafe.co.uk.

Relaxation

Relaxation can help relieve and prevent anxiety related to obsessions and compulsions.

- Relaxation exercises are available to download on moodcafé - www.moodcafe.co.uk/download-relaxation-exercises.aspx.
- A free relaxation CD and booklet are available from Steps for Stress - www.stepsforstress.org.

Organisations that can help

There are lots of organisations out there that can help. Some have helplines that you can contact to have a chat about your anxiety.

Specific to OCD:

- OCD-UK - www.ocduk.org, helpline - 0845 120 3778 (Mon-Fri 9am – 5pm, subject to volunteer availability) or email support@ocduk.org. OCD-UK also discussion forums where they facilitate a safe environment for people affected by OCD to communicate with each other - www.ocdforums.org.
- The patient website provides links to further self-help documents for OCD - <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/obsessions-and-compulsions-self-help-guides>.

Anxiety and Panic:

- Anxiety UK - www.anxietyuk.org.uk, helpline – 08444 775 774 (Mon-Fri 9:30am-5:30pm)
- No more panic - www.nomorepanic.co.uk. Includes a forum where you can chat to people who are having similar problems.
- For more national helplines and organisations check our moodcafé - www.moodcafe.co.uk/national-helplines/national-helplines-and-groups-in-fife.aspx.

Treatment for OCD

Psychological treatment can help many people with OCD. An important part of treatment involves the person facing up to what they fear. They begin with the easiest situations and work up to more difficult ones. This process is called exposure. While doing this, the person must not carry out any of their compulsive behaviours (response prevention). No force is involved – the therapist works with the person to help them understand their experiences and learn different ways of behaving.

How to access further help

If you find you are getting worse, or think you might need further help overcoming your obsessions and compulsions, speak to your GP.



Visit moodcafe.co.uk
for more helpful resources

