Obsessive compulsive disorder

Also called: OCD

Excessive thoughts (obsessions) that lead to repetitive behaviors (compulsions).

**Common**

More than 200,000 US cases per year

- Treatment can help, but this condition can’t be cured
- Chronic: can last for years or be lifelong
- Requires a medical diagnosis
- Lab tests or imaging not required

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is characterized by unreasonable thoughts and fears (obsessions) that lead to compulsive behaviors. OCD often centers on themes such as a fear of germs or the need to arrange objects in a specific manner. Symptoms usually begin gradually and vary throughout life.

Treatment includes talk therapy, medications, or both.

**Ages affected**

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-13
- 14-18
- 19-40
- 41-60
- 60+

**Symptoms**

Requires a medical diagnosis

OCD often centers on themes such as a fear of germs or the need to arrange objects in a specific manner. Symptoms usually begin gradually and vary throughout life.

**People may experience:**

**Behavioral:** compulsive behavior, agitation, compulsive hoarding, hypervigilance, impulsivity, meaningless repetition of own words, repetitive movements, ritualistic behavior, social isolation, or persistent repetition of words or actions

**Mood:** anxiety, apprehension, guilt, or panic attack

**Psychological:** depression, fear, or repeatedly going over thoughts

**Also common:** food aversion or nightmares
Treatments

Treatment consists of self care and therapy
Treatment includes talk therapy, medications, or both.

Medications

**Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI):** Eases symptoms of depressed mood and anxiety.
- Sertraline (Zoloft)
- Escitalopram (Lexapro)
- Citalopram (Celexa)
- Fluvoxamine
- Fluoxetine (Prozac, Sarafem, and Prozac Weekly)
- Paroxetine (Paxil, Pexeva, and Paxil CR)

**Anxiolytic:** Relieves anxiety and tension. May promote sleep.
- Buspirone

**Antidepressant:** Prevents or relieves depression and elevates mood.
- Venlafaxine (Effexor XR)
- Clomipramine (Anafranil)

Therapies

**Support group:** A forum for counseling and sharing experiences among people with a similar condition or goal, such as depression or weight loss.

**Cognitive behavioral therapy:** A talk therapy focused on modifying negative thoughts, behaviors, and emotional responses associated with psychological distress.

**Aversion therapy:** Suppressing unwanted behavior, like smoking, by associating it with a negative experience, like an electric shock.

**Psychoeducation:** Education about mental health that also serves to support, validate, and empower patients.

**Rational emotive behavior therapy:** Psychological treatment that helps people change negative, irrational thoughts and improve emotional well-being.

**Exposure and response prevention:** A talk therapy based on exposing feared or traumatic experiences within a safe setting in order to help reduce any associated psychological distress.

**Psychotherapy:** Treatment of mental or behavioral disorders through talk therapy.

**Systematic desensitization:** Psychological treatment that helps people overcome fears by gradually exposing them to the things they're afraid of.

**Group psychotherapy:** Talk therapy where the therapist works with clients in a group instead of one-on-one.

Specialists

**Clinical psychologist:** Treats mental disorders primarily with talk therapy.

**Psychiatrist:** Treats mental disorders primarily with medications.

Consult a doctor for medical advice

Note: The information you see describes what usually happens with a medical condition, but doesn't apply to everyone. This information isn't medical advice, so make sure to contact a healthcare provider if you have a medical problem. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call your doctor or an emergency number immediately.

Sources: Mayo Clinic and others. Learn more