

What is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)?

OCD is an anxiety disorder, characterised by the presence of recurring intrusive and unwanted thoughts, images, or impulses — obsessions, and repetitive behavioural and mental rituals — compulsions. People with OCD are usually aware that their symptoms are irrational and excessive, but they find the obsessions uncontrollable and the compulsions difficult or impossible to resist.

What are the symptoms?

Obsessions and compulsions are distressing, exhausting, take up a lot of time, and can significantly interfere with the person's family and social relationships, daily routines, education or working life. Common obsessions include: fears of contamination from germs or dirt; fears of harm to self or others; intrusive sexual thoughts or images and concerns with symmetry, illness or religious issues. Common compulsions include: washing; cleaning; checking; hoarding; touching; counting, and repeating routine activities and actions.

What causes OCD?

The causes of OCD are not fully understood. Research indicates that OCD may be related to chemical, structural and functional abnormalities in the brain. Genetic and hereditary factors may also play a role in the development of OCD. It is likely that each person's OCD is the result of several interacting factors and is affected by stressful life events, hormonal changes and personality traits.

How many people develop OCD?

About three in every hundred people will develop OCD at some time in their lives — that is more than 450,000 Australians.

How is OCD treated?

Treatment can help people manage their obsessions and compulsions, to reduce and sometimes even eliminate the symptoms of OCD. Currently the most effective treatments are medication, cognitive behaviour therapy, and community support and recovery programs. A combination of treatments, a skilled and experience clinician, support and education are likely to produce the best outcome.

④ Medication

Certain medications assist the brain to restore its usual chemical balance and help control the obsessions and compulsions.

④ Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

A doctor, psychologist or other health professional talks with the person about their symptoms, and discusses alternative ways of thinking about and coping with them.

④ Community support and recovery programs

Support groups provide an environment where people with OCD and their families can meet to give and receive support. Information is provided, along with self-help and coping strategies. Understanding and acceptance by the community is also very important.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness. For more information about this topic see:

④ [SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments](#)

Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.

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