

## **OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER – WHEN ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH**

Article by: Cheryl Sol

### INTRODUCTION

Do you find yourself going back to check if your door is locked, your tap switched off, your stove left on? Do you ever worry about something so much that unless you do go back to check it, despite the convenience, you will become so filled with discomfort or anxiety that you eventually have to go back and do it.

Do you worry about germs and contamination? That everything you touch is dirty. Not just about washing your hands before you eat, after you go to the toilet or when you have been in a place that doesn't feel clean. Rather, do you feel dirty even when you have washed your hands? Maybe you even wash repeatedly until they sometimes become sensitive or even raw.

Do you ever worry that you have driven over an animal or a person and find that you can't continue to drive on until you have checked it. Even when you find that there is nothing there, you feel relieved and go back to where you were heading, but the belief will probably come back soon after.

It may be that you have obsessive compulsive disorder

OCD is about having repeated unwanted thoughts. To make the thoughts go away you have to repeat the same actions again and again.

Some of these actions may be fairly simple e.g. washing your hands while others may be quite complex rituals e.g. counting in multiples of a number while washing your hands a certain number of times in a particular way.

Compulsive behaviour can be very time consuming and interfere with normal activity. The beliefs underlying them can seem very real to the person who is having them even though they may seem very irrational to someone else.

Symptoms can be mild to severe and children can also suffer from OCD.

People with OCD often also suffer from depression

OCD occurs more often in people whose siblings or parents have symptoms of OCD.

It is found in all ethnic groups.

### IN WHAT WAY IS OCD DIFFERENT TO OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS.

Are you seen by others as a perfectionist? Things are either right or wrong and they must be done the correct way.

Maybe a common saying of yours is "if you can't do something properly then don't do it at all." Do people see you as inflexible, seeing things in black and white with no grey in-between?

Do you get irritable if your clothes are not perfectly ironed, your car always clean and your home tidy. Is it about an all or nothing thing? Not just that you prefer these things to happen and strive for it but that you are strongly affected if they are not.

If you have an obsessive compulsive personality you are also likely to be concerned about not wasting anything, including time, and tend towards being serious and hardworking. You may also find that you prefer order and have stringent lists and schedules to make sure that nothing is left incomplete or forgotten. You are likely to be efficient and easily irritated by others inefficiency. You may not like to lend out your belongings in case others don't look after them as well as you do.

Relationships may become strained because of demands placed on employees, family or friends to meet your standards.

While all of the above will interfere with your life in some way, you may be very reluctant to change any of your behaviour or beliefs or see the need. It is more likely that others will want you to change.

While people with OCD feel out of control from their symptoms, if you have an OCPD (personality) you are more likely to feel out of control if someone wants you to change your behaviour e.g. give up your perfectionism.

### WHAT IS OCD?

OCD is classified as an anxiety disorder. It is believed that underlying this behaviour is a great deal of anxiety. The obsession is the thought e.g. "I don't think I switched the stove off". This causes increasing anxiety. The compulsion is the drive within you to have to check it to reduce the anxiety. These thoughts may involve a fear that something bad will happen to yourself or a loved one if you don't repeat a certain ritual.

### IS OCD TREATABLE?

OCD can be very disruptive to your life.

It is a chronic or long term condition that is unlikely to spontaneously remit without treatment.

Many people with OCD are very secretive about it and avoid treatment until it is severely affecting them. Like any condition it is likely to be more treatable the sooner it is dealt with.

Treatment options can include medication to deal with the underlying anxiety/depression and psychotherapy to deal with the behavioural and thought patterns involved.

It may also involve looking at coping mechanisms or relationship difficulties caused by the OCD.

Once on treatment, it is extremely important to maintain consistency and continuity in your treatment to prevent a relapse.

However the most important start is to be properly assessed for the appropriate treatment and to believe that you can be helped.