

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a mental health condition characterised by **intrusive thoughts and repetitive behaviours** that cause distress and interfere with daily functioning. This leaflet provides general information about OCD and how it is understood in psychiatric care.

What Is OCD?

OCD involves:

- **Obsessions:** unwanted, intrusive thoughts, images, or urges
- **Compulsions:** repetitive behaviours or mental acts carried out to reduce distress

The thoughts and behaviours are experienced as difficult to control and are often recognised as excessive or unreasonable.

Obsessions

Obsessions are:

- Intrusive and unwanted
- Distressing or anxiety-provoking
- Often repetitive

Common themes may involve:

- Contamination or illness
- Harm or responsibility
- Order, symmetry, or exactness
- Doubt and uncertainty

Having intrusive thoughts does **not** mean a person wants to act on them.

Compulsions

Compulsions are behaviours or mental acts performed to:

- Reduce anxiety or distress

- Prevent a feared outcome

Examples include:

- Repeated checking
- Excessive washing or cleaning
- Reassurance seeking
- Mental rituals such as counting or reviewing

Relief from compulsions is usually temporary, which can reinforce the cycle.

The OCD Cycle

OCD often follows a cycle:

1. Intrusive thought or doubt
2. Anxiety or distress
3. Compulsive behaviour or mental act
4. Temporary relief
5. Return of intrusive thoughts

Understanding this cycle helps guide treatment.

How OCD Affects Daily Life

OCD can affect:

- Time and energy
- Work or study performance
- Relationships
- Confidence and independence

Severity varies, and symptoms may fluctuate over time.

Causes and Contributing Factors

OCD develops due to a combination of factors, including:

- Biological vulnerability
- Brain circuitry involved in anxiety and habit formation
- Personality and coping styles
- Stressful life events

There is no single cause.

Diagnosis and Assessment

Diagnosis is based on:

- Clinical assessment
- Symptom patterns and severity
- Impact on functioning

Diagnosis may take time and is reviewed as treatment progresses.

Treatment Approaches

Effective treatment for OCD often includes:

- Psychological therapy focused on reducing compulsions
- Medication where appropriate
- Ongoing review and support

Treatment aims to reduce the impact of OCD rather than eliminate all intrusive thoughts.

Avoidance and Reassurance

Avoidance and repeated reassurance can:

- Reduce distress temporarily
- Maintain OCD symptoms over time

Treatment focuses on building tolerance for uncertainty and reducing reliance on compulsions.

Recovery and Outlook

Many people with OCD:

- Experience significant improvement with treatment
- Learn strategies to manage symptoms
- Regain functioning and independence

Improvement is usually **gradual**, with setbacks at times.

When to Seek Help

Professional help is recommended if:

- Obsessions or compulsions are time-consuming
- Distress is significant
- Daily functioning is affected

Early support can reduce long-term impact.

Summary

OCD is a treatable condition involving intrusive thoughts and repetitive behaviours. With appropriate care, many people experience meaningful improvement and regain quality of life.
