

Disability Insight

Take a look around you

Mental Health:

6th February 2020

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Key points

- OCD is a mental health condition and stands for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.
- People with OCD experience patterns of obsessions (a thought, image or urge which creates distress) that lead to compulsions (acts/behaviours repeated to reduce the distress triggered by the obsession).
- It's estimated that 1.2% of the UK population have OCD
- Common obsessions include a fear of contamination, a fear of harm occurring, and an excessive concern with exactness/order
- Compulsions are learned behaviours which become repetitive and habitual when associated with a relief from anxiety. Common examples include excessive cleaning and checking
- Obsessions and compulsions can interfere with daily life and cause significant distress, however the condition is treatable

1 About OCD

OCD is a common mental health condition where a person experiences obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours. Anyone can develop OCD however it commonly starts in men earlier than woman. Symptoms can make themselves known around puberty but often emerge during early adulthood. OCD can be distressing and significantly interfere with daily life but treatment can help to keep it under control. The most widely used criteria for diagnosis are frequent obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors.

What are the causes of OCD?

Whilst the causes of OCD are not fully understood, it is thought a number of factors may play a role. Family history of the condition makes it more likely that

Supported by BSO Equality Unit

someone will develop OCD. There are also thought to be biological factors e.g. low levels of the brain chemical serotonin and environmental factors e.g. stressful life events or factors that may increase the risk of developing or triggering OCD.

What treatments are available for OCD?

People with OCD are often ashamed, reluctant or embarrassed to seek help. Having OCD doesn't mean you are "mad" and it's not your fault you have it. Based on symptoms your GP can advise on the treatment options available. These can help to reduce the impact that OCD has on daily life and include:

- Therapy – usually Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which helps you face your fears and challenge obsessive thoughts without “putting them right”
- Medicine – usually anti-depressants, namely serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's) which can help by altering chemical balances in the brain.

CBT will usually work quite quickly, however it will take a few months to see results from SSRI's. Some people may also be referred to a specialist mental health facility depending on the severity of the condition.

2 How does OCD affect someone's life?

OCD can affect people in several ways. Some people may spend their days carrying out various compulsions and are unable to get out of the house or manage day to day activities. Others may appear to be coping with daily life whilst still suffering a huge amount of distress from obsessive thoughts. OCD can be a very life-limiting condition with serious implications for someone's wellbeing. Please click on the link below to read a poem written by someone living with OCD

<https://www.ocduk.org/holly-just-my-ocd/>

3 Supporting someone with OCD in work

It's a person's right to decide whether or not to disclose their disability to their employer. Under the Equalities Act (2010), OCD is defined as a disability and so if the disability is disclosed, the employer has a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments. In order to ensure that adjustments are appropriate and effective, they should be developed with the individual affected. It's common for intrusive thoughts to revolve around taboo subjects however these are the person's worse fears and are not in line with their morals or beliefs. Here are some challenges that people with OCD face and the reasonable adjustments that can be adopted:

- Difficulty getting to work on time. This may be due not to oversleeping or disorganisation but to time consuming rituals when leaving the house e.g. continuous checking of appliances. The reasonable adjustment would be to implement flexible working hours.
- Difficulty travelling on public transport. Travelling on buses and trains can be an anxiety provoking situation for somebody with OCD and could cause intrusive thoughts about harm, contamination fears etc. The reasonable adjustment would be to provide flexible working hours or time to destress when they arrive at work.
- Difficulty meeting deadlines or concentrating due to ruminating. Rumination is a common symptom of OCD and can often leave people obsessing over a past thought, memory or scenario they are worried about. The reasonable adjustment would be allowing someone to take short regular breaks
- Sharing a workspace. For some people with OCD, in particular those with obsessions revolving around order or contamination fears, a shared work space might trigger anxiety and panic. The reasonable adjustment would be to allow the employee to have their own desk and agree with other staff that the desk will not be used by anyone else when the person with OCD is absent.
- Not being able to get to work at all. A person may wake up and feel as though they cannot face going into work due to a flare up of OCD symptoms. The reasonable adjustment would be to provide the opportunity to work from home

For an article of somebody with OCD in the work place please follow the below link

<https://www.inc.com/indigo-triplett/why-ocd-is-a-serious-workplace-matter.html>

4 Support for you if you care for somebody with OCD

Supporting a loved one with OCD can bring challenges, both physical and emotional. For example, the onset of symptoms at untimely hours can cause physical fatigue while the initial diagnosis and unpredictability of symptoms can cause emotional distress. Coping strategies will allow you to use healthy mechanisms to both protect your wellbeing and strengthen your relationship with your loved one. Educate yourself as much as possible by taking advice from the GP and researching articles. Whilst you may know generalized facts about OCD it's important that you continue learning about the disorder especially as new

research is being done every day to better understand and treat the condition. Being well educated on the subject can have various benefits:

- Better able to understand and predict your loved one's manifestations of the illness
- Better able to provide support for them during times of duress
- Feel self-assured that in dealing with difficult situations
- Feel more comfortable in sharing your story with others in an honest and open way

5 Support for you if you have OCD

Talking openly and honestly about your experiences can help you to find acceptance. Seek out OCD support groups and partnerships, even online, where you can talk candidly to people who have experienced similar symptoms and can empathise with what you are going through. There are several organisations that can provide support and sign post to groups such as:

<https://support.therapytribe.com/ocd-support-group/>

Sources and further reading:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/>
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/about-ocd/>

