

# PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

## Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Symptoms And When To Seek Treatment

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### SYMPTOMS OF OCD MAY INCLUDE ONE OR BOTH OF OBSESSIONS AND COMPULSIONS

**OBSESSIONS** are intrusive and persistent thoughts, images or urges that recur constantly. For example, individuals might be obsessed with cleanliness or germs and constantly think about these thoughts; if they act on these obsessions, these become compulsions. They may find themselves constantly washing their hands or sanitizing their house out of fear of contamination. Common obsessions include: fear of germs or filth, fear of thinking evil thoughts, constant need to create order, balance and exactness, and a need for frequent reassurance.

- Fear of germs or filth
- Fear of thinking
- Evil thoughts
- Constant need to create order
- Balance and exactness
- A need for frequent reassurance

**COMPULSIONS** are behaviors or mental acts that individuals feel forced to perform either due to intrusive thoughts or self-made rules that must be followed to decrease their anxiety. These acts can be thought of as rituals the individual must perform. Examples include touching items in a certain sequence when entering a room or repeatedly counting to a particular number. Even if completing these acts does not make sense to the individual, doing so can help relieve the distress of the compulsion. Common compulsions include repeating rituals such as:

- Touching objects
- Counting
- Frequently checking that doors are locked
- Checking to make sure appliances are turned off or unplugged even when they know they are
- Repetitive grooming
- Self-cleaning acts such as washing hands, showering or brushing teeth

### WHEN TO SEEK TREATMENT

Your doctor can do an assessments and help treat your symptoms. You should seek treatment when symptoms become overwhelming or interfere with daily activities. This may include symptoms that occur for 2–3 hours daily, are severe, cause increased anxiety or are hard to resist acting upon or controlling. Because patients may or may not have insight into the irrational nature of their obsessions or compulsions, family or close friends may need to help guide them to seek help.

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