
OCD Comes In Many Forms

Author:

Jennifer G. Wells, MSW, LISW, [Lindner Center of HOPE](#), Social Worker

Summary:

Obsessive compulsive disorder is an anxiety disorder that can manifest itself in many ways. However, OCD is treatable through a combination of medication and psychotherapy consisting of behavior modification.

The alarm clock has been set for the morning, and it's time to roll over and get some sleep. But not quite yet. It only takes a few seconds for the worry to begin. A minute later, the anxiety starts to build. Turning back over to look at the clock is inevitable, as is reaching out and pushing the "alarm set" button to make sure that it is indeed set for the right time. Temporarily satisfied, the head hits the pillow once again. But is the alarm clock really set correctly?

Breakfast is over and the stove has been turned off. The on-off dial has been checked two or three times. The stovetop has even been physically checked for heat several times by moving a hand over the element. Bags are grabbed, and it's off to work. Only a few steps have been taken beyond the front door before the question is revisited; is there no doubt that the stove has been turned off? Back inside for another look just to make sure. On the road, a mile away from home now, a jolt of uneasiness dictates that the car be turned around in order to go back to make 100 percent sure that the stove has been turned off.

These are just a couple examples of the many ways in which Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) can manifest itself.

What is OCD?

Obsession is a near uncontrollable desire or perceived need where there exists a focus or preoccupation with a subject, thought, idea or emotion. In an attempt to ease the fear and anxiety — and satisfy the urges and inclinations — resulting from an obsession, repetitive or ritualistic behavior is carried out. Even though an individual suffering from OCD may be able to recognize the irrational nature of their behavior on an intellectual level, they still feel compelled to perform their rituals in order to gain some relief from their apprehensions.

Below are some of the more common obsessions and the compulsive repetitive-task behaviors sometimes associated with them:

- Due to a fear that harm or loss may result from something not locked or turned on or off, there is a need to frequently and repetitively check the object of concern.
- Arranging things so that they are in perfect order or in a certain symmetrical pattern. By not accomplishing these tasks, the OCD sufferer feels as if their life will be thrown out of balance or possibly into complete disorganization.

- Aggressive obsessions where people have very disturbing thoughts that they may hurt themselves or someone else and therefore engage in time consuming preventative or checking compulsions to ensure that they do not or did not hurt someone.
- Obsessive-compulsive hand and body washers have deep fears and anxieties about germs and contamination. Those who feel they must continually clean their dwellings to a point of almost clinical spotlessness share similar fears.

OCD Treatment

Typically, a combination of medication and psychotherapy is used to combat OCD. When medications are used, they come in the form of antidepressants which can help reduce the symptoms. However, depending on the severity of the OCD, medications are not always necessary.

Currently, the most effective behavioral therapy for OCD sufferers is called “exposure and response prevention,” or ERP. According to the Stanford University School of Medicine, roughly 50 percent of OCD patients benefitted from ERP therapy without the use of any medication.

The goal of ERP is to get the patient to understand that the distress associated with obsessions will diminish even without performing compulsive rituals.

Sources:

Helpguide.org. *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)*. Retrieved on February 3, 2011 from: http://helpguide.org/mental/obsessive_compulsive_disorder OCD.htm

National Alliance on Mental Illness. *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*. Retrieved on February 3, 2011 from: http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=By_Illness&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=54&ContentID=23035

Stanford School of Medicine. *Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders – Behavior Therapy*. Retrieved on February 3, 2011 from: <http://ocd.stanford.edu/treatment/psychotherapy.html>