

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

AND COVID-19



PSYCHOLOGY
CHARTERED

WHAT IS OCD?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, commonly referred to as OCD, is a serious anxiety condition characterised by **obsessions** and **compulsions**. Obsessions are frequent unwanted images, worries or doubts that repeatedly occur in a sufferer's mind which often cause anxiety and distress. Compulsions are activities or rituals that are repetitively performed by the sufferer in response to their obsessions in order to reduce their anxiety or prevent perceived danger.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Whilst many people are experiencing worry in response to the current situation, for most people these worries will be fleeting. However, for people with OCD these fears may be more intense and create extreme anxiety and distress.

Some main areas of concern resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak for people with OCD are:

- Worries that may have been deemed irrational or very unlikely to occur may feel more realistic or likely
- More intense fears of contamination, leading to extensive compulsions e.g. washing hands
- Increase in obsessions around one's own health
- Obsessions and intrusions around accidentally passing on the virus, or fears of having done so intentionally
- Reduced capacity for seeking treatment
- Worries about where the line is between following government guidance and what is a compulsion

SOME TIPS FOR COPING

LIMIT EXPOSURE TO NEWS

Be selective about how often you look at the news and where you consume information. Perhaps limit yourself to only checking reputable sites once or twice a day, and avoid social media mis-information.

FOLLOW GOVERNMENT ADVISE, BUT DO NOT GO BEYOND

For some people, the government advice on hand washing and reducing social contact may represent compulsions they have worked hard to reduce. It could be easy to go beyond the guidelines and fall back into excessive behaviours as a result of this. Instead it may be helpful to stick rigidly to guidelines and not go beyond e.g. wash your hands for 20 seconds at a time and no more.

UTILISE SUPPORT

Many charities provide online or phone support which may be especially helpful if you wish to speak to someone who understands.

STICK TO A ROUTINE

The closure of workplaces, schools etc may mean that you have far more time to ruminate and perform compulsions. Try and stick to a routine and structure to fill your time.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Try and cut yourself some slack - recognise that this is a really difficult time. If you feel you've taken a bit of a step back in your recovery, or you occasionally perform a compulsion, then try and not be too hard on yourself.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

OCD UK – www.ocduk.org

OCD action – www.ocdaction.org.uk

MIND www.mind.org.uk

THE SAMARITANS – www.samaritans.org, 116 123

<https://www.ocduk.org/ocd-coronavirus-summary/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-coping-with-ocd-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

<https://www.priorygroup.com/media-centre/ocd-and-coronavirus-what-those-with-obsessive-compulsive-disorder-can-do-to-cope>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/all-about-anxiety/202003/living-ocd-during-covid-19>