Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

What is OCD?

OCD is a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours and can feel a range of emotions relating to this. OCD is an anxiety disorder, and those with it will feel intense anxiety surrounding their obsessions and compulsions.

The compulsive behaviour temporarily relieves the anxiety induced by the obsession, but the cycle will begin again, causing increased obsessions and compulsions.

OCD affects men, women and children, but it normally starts during early adulthood. OCD can occur during or after pregnancy. It can be deeply distressing and significantly affect a person's ability to carry out day-to-day tasks.

What are common obsessions?

- Fear of deliberately harming yourself or others
- Fear of harming yourself or others by accident — for example, worrying you will set the house on fire by leaving the cooker on
- Fear of contamination through disease, infection or substances
- A need for symmetry and order
- Unwanted violent thoughts
- Unwanted sexual thoughts

Just because a person has these thoughts, it does not mean they will act on them. The thoughts are unwanted.

What are common compulsions?

- Repeated handwashing
- Repeating an action over and over
- Obsessive cleaning
- Counting
- Ordering and arranging
- Hoarding
- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Avoiding places, situations or people that may trigger obsessive thoughts
- Thinking 'neutralising' thoughts to counter the obsessive thoughts

Many compulsions may not be obvious to other people.

Symptoms

- Obsessions — where an unwanted, intrusive thought, image or urge repeatedly enters a person's mind
- Compulsions — repetitive behaviours or mental acts that a person feels driven to perform as a result of anxiety and distress caused by the obsession
- Intense anxiety and distress

What causes OCD?

It is not known exactly what causes OCD, but some factors are common:

- Family history — when a close family member also has OCD
- Life events, such as bereavement, childbirth, abuse or neglect
- Personality traits
- Existing anxiety

How can an OCD be treated?

- Psychological therapies, such as CBT or Exposure Therapy
- Medicine, such as an antidepressant

How to get help

- Visit your GP, who will be able to discuss referral and treatment options with you

- Find local services near you for OCD through the Hub of Hope

If you or someone you know is in crisis, it's important to get help fast. If you think that you or someone you know is in danger, call 999.

Source: NHS