

Managing Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

If you have been diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), you may be relieved that you now know why you have felt or behaved a certain way. You may also feel overwhelmed about the treatment ahead, how to get the support you need, and how to deal with the condition day-to-day. With treatment and support, you can manage your OCD.

How to manage lifestyle changes

Managing stress

Stress is your body's reaction to life changes and events, both good and bad. Stress can play a major role in OCD, so it is important to learn how to cope with stress. Some techniques to cope with stress include:

- Meditation, muscle relaxation, and breathing exercises.
- Exercise. Even a short daily walk can help to lower stress levels.
- Getting enough good-quality sleep.
- Spending time on hobbies that you enjoy.
- Accepting and letting go of things that you cannot change.



To help you manage stress associated with OCD, your health care provider may recommend exposure and response prevention therapy. In this therapy, you will be exposed to the distressing situation that triggers your compulsion and be prevented from responding to it. With repetition of this process over time, you will no longer feel the distress or need to perform the compulsion.

Medicines

Your health care provider may suggest certain medicines for depression (*antidepressants*) if he or she feels that they will help to improve your condition. Avoid using alcohol and other substances that may prevent your medicines from working properly. It is also important to:

- Talk with your pharmacist or health care provider about all medicines that you take, their possible side effects, and which medicines are safe to take together.
- Make it your goal to take part in all treatment decisions (*shared decision-making*). Ask about possible side effects of medicines that your health care provider recommends, and tell him or her how you feel about having those side effects. It is best if shared decision-making with your health care provider is part of your total treatment plan.

If you are taking medicines as part of your treatment, **do not** stop taking medicines before you ask your health care provider if it is safe to stop. You may need to have the medicine slowly decreased (*tapered*) over time to lower the risk of harmful side effects.

Relationships

Consider giving education materials to friends and family. Your family and friends may need to learn about your OCD in order to cope with your condition and support you as you manage your condition. Family therapy may also help to lower stress and relieve tension.

How to recognize changes in your condition

Some signs that your condition may be getting worse include:

- Being anxious about germs or dirt.
- Having harmful thoughts about yourself or others.
- Making sure that household objects are alike or perfectly organized in a specific way.
- Having great difficulty making decisions, or second-guessing yourself after making a decision.
- Constant cleaning and handwashing.
- Repeating behavior such as repeatedly checking to see if a door is locked or the oven is off.
- Counting nonstop or uncontrollably.

Follow these instructions at home:

Medicines

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Check with your health care provider before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medicines.

General instructions

- Ask for support from trusted family members or friends to make sure you stay on-track with your treatment.
- Keep a journal to write down your daily moods, medicines, sleep habits, and life events. Doing this may help you have more success with your treatment.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle. Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and take time to relax.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider and therapist. This is important.



Where to find support

Talking with others

It may be difficult to tell loved ones about your condition, but they can be a good support system for you. You can work with your therapist to decide whom to tell and when to tell them. Here are some tips for starting the conversation:

- Start by sharing your experience with OCD. It is up to you how much detail you want to provide.
- Let your loved ones know that you are seeking treatment.
- **Do not** expect loved ones to understand your condition right away.

Finances

Not all insurance plans cover mental health care, so it is important to check with your insurance carrier. If paying for co-pays or counseling services is a problem, search for a local or county mental health care center. Public mental health care services may be offered there at a low cost or no cost when you are not able to see a private health care provider.

If you are taking medicine for depression, you may be able to get the generic form, which may be less expensive than brand-name medicine. Some makers of prescription medicines also offer help to patients who cannot afford the medicines they need.

Questions to ask your health care provider

- If you are taking medicines:
 - How long do I need to take medicine?
 - Are there any long-term side effects of my medicine?
 - Are there any alternatives to taking medicine?
- How would I benefit from therapy?
- How often should I follow up with a health care provider?

Where to find more information

- International OCD Foundation: www.iocdf.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org

Contact a health care provider if:

- Your symptoms get worse or they do not get better with treatment.
- You develop new symptoms.

Get help right away if:

- Your symptoms get worse or they do not get better with treatment.
- You have thoughts about hurting yourself or others.

If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:

- **Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.**

Summary

- Stress can play a major role in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Learning ways to deal with stress may help your treatment work better for you.
- If you are taking medicines as part of your treatment, **do not** stop taking medicines before you ask your health care provider if it is safe to stop.
- When talking with family members and friends about your OCD, decide how much detail you want to give them and be patient as they work to understand your condition.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider and therapist. This is important.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.