

Tips for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Developed in collaboration with the mental health centers of NBHP and FBHP & the Client and Family Advisory Board

- 1. Learn about OCD.** OCD is an anxiety disorder in which people have unwanted, repeated thoughts (obsessions) and feel driven to perform certain behaviors (compulsions) to calm unwanted thoughts. You are not alone and recovery is possible. Approximately 3.3 million (or 1 in 82) people in USA have OCD.
- 2. Understand the cycle of OCD.** Rituals (e.g. checking, counting, seeking reassurance) are behaviors that you do to try to get rid of unwanted obsessions or thoughts. For example, checking several times that the stove is turned off to decrease worry about starting a fire. Rituals can make you feel better in the short term, so you keep doing it, but the worry keeps coming back. Continuing to perform the ritual never gives you the chance to learn more effective ways to manage obsessions. Instead of helping you manage anxiety, these strategies actually make the obsessions happen more often in the long term.
- 3. Be open with your therapist** about your obsessive thoughts. It is common for people to fear embarrassment or judgment if they talk about their unwanted thoughts. Thinking an unpleasant thought does not mean you are a bad person and thinking about something over and over doesn't mean it will happen. You control your behavior! Being open with your therapist can help you have more compassion for yourself.
- 4. Set goals** to stay motivated when treatment gets hard. When you first start to confront the fears you have been trying to avoid, it can be scary and hard. Setting personal goals and clearly identifying the changes that you want to make can help you stick with it through the hard stuff to move toward the life you want.
- 5. Practice the skills** learned in therapy and actively work toward managing obsessions and compulsive behaviors. This challenge requires commitment, guidance from your therapist, and daily practice. Smart phone apps, (i.e. "I counselor ocd" and "ocd minder") can help you practice your skills outside of therapy.
 - a. Meditation, yoga, deep breathing,** and other stress relief techniques help reduce the symptoms of anxiety. A form of meditation called mindfulness may be particularly helpful for OCD. Talk to your therapist or search "mindfulness" videos on Youtube to learn more about how to use this technique.
 - b. Write down your rituals** (or actions that you do to try to get rid of unwanted thoughts) to be more aware of your patterns and behaviors.
 - c. Work slowly towards cutting back on performing your ritual.** Instead of checking 10 times, try 8, then 6, until you feel able to let go of the compulsive behavior altogether.
 - d. Delay performing your ritual.** Try waiting one minute before performing a ritual in response to an unwanted thought, then wait 5 minutes, 10 minutes, etc.
 - e. Practice challenging irrational thoughts.** Ask yourself "Is this fear realistic?" and work toward adding self-reassuring or soothing thoughts, such as "I'm going to be ok."
- 6. Create a healthy lifestyle** that includes exercise, proper nutrition and getting regular sleep. Avoid using alcohol and/or drugs to cope. Their use will only worsen OCD and interfere with any medications you take.
- 7. Medications may be helpful in managing symptoms.** Medications will not cure OCD, but they may help manage symptoms along with therapy. Talk to your prescriber about side effects, whether the medication is helpful and other concerns you may have.
- 8. Create support and get involved in social activities,** rather than isolating yourself. Sometimes it may feel that OCD symptoms consume your life and leave little time for contact with others. Involving others in your treatment can help guard against setbacks and keep you motivated on the path to recovery. Family and friends can help you practice your new skills. Sharing problems and successes with others in a support group can also be helpful. Having fun, laughing, and including humor in your life can make a big difference in how you feel.

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Resources for Clients

Abramowitz JS: *Getting Over OCD: A 10-Step Workbook for Taking Back Your Life*. New York, Guilford Press, 2009

Anthony, M., Swinson R: *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough: Strategies for Coping with Perfectionism*. Oakland, CA, New Harbinger Publications, 2009.

DuFrene T, Hyman B: *Coping With OCD: Practical Strategies for Living Well With Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*. Oakland, CA, Harbinger Publications, 2008

International OCD Foundation: <http://www.ocfoundation.org/>

MAYO Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/obsessive-compulsive-disorder/DS00189/DSECTION=symptoms>

National Institute for Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/index.shtml>

Yadin E, Foa EB, Lichner TK: *Treating Your OCD With Exposure and Response (Ritual) Prevention: Workbook*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2012