



tip Why do people develop OCD?

Having a close family member with OCD raises the risk of developing this condition. It may be related to a chemical imbalance that disrupts communication between parts of the brain. Serotonin, a substance that works as a messenger in the brain, may be involved. Drugs that boost serotonin levels can reduce OCD symptoms.

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Mind matters

Current Article

Obsessive-compulsive disorder: Overtaken by unwanted thoughts

Howie Mandel, host of the TV show *Deal or No Deal*, refuses to shake hands with people — he'll only fist bump. Marc Summers, former host of Nickelodeon's *Double Dare*, constantly cleans and straightens. Mandel is afraid of germs. Summers is anxious about neatness.



If these thoughts happened only once in a while, it wouldn't seem all that unusual. But, for Mandel and Summers, such unwanted thoughts are so intrusive that they get in the way of everyday life.

It's called obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) — a condition shared by more than 2 million people in the United States. People with OCD have persistent obsessions and use compulsions to control their anxiety.

The obsessions

Besides fear of germs and concern with the specific order of objects, obsessions may include:

- Always being worried about losing things of little or no value
- Feeling overly responsible for the safety of others
- Troubling religious or sexual thoughts

The compulsions

In order to control obsessive thoughts, people with OCD develop behaviors called compulsions. They may perform rituals such as:

- Repeated hand washing
- Counting items, such as sentences on a page
- Locking and relocking doors
- Putting things in a specific, unnecessary order
- Hoarding unneeded objects
- Repeating a name or phrase
- Checking and rechecking that appliances are turned off or unplugged
- Being overly concerned with routines and schedules

These behaviors can give temporary relief from OCD, but there's no long-lasting sense of completion. Also, people may spend hours every day doing them, sometimes missing school, disrupting work or affecting family time as a result.

Taking control

If you have OCD symptoms, see your doctor or a mental health specialist for a diagnosis. The condition can't be cured. But, treatment can help you gain control of your thoughts and behaviors.

OCD usually responds well to medicines, such as anti-anxiety drugs and antidepressants. The symptoms also may improve with cognitive-behavioral therapy. This is talk therapy that helps people change their thinking patterns and behaviors. For example, a person can learn to wait longer between ritual hand washings. This might lessen the fear of germs. A combination of talk therapy and medicine often works best.

Watch for OCD in children

Find out about helping children with OCD symptoms by visiting myuhc.com. Click "Health & Wellness," then type "OCD" into the search bar.

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