

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive behavior is quite common. Felix Unger, of television's "Odd Couple" made famous an obsession with cleanliness.

Many people have similar obsessive behaviors, such as persistently organizing their desk in a certain way. More familiar to us is the practice of frequently washing hands. We're happy to say this is not Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). This disorder is much more extreme than these idiosyncrasies.

OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) is rare, however, it can affect children, teenagers and adults. People with this disorder suffer from both obsessions and compulsions.

Obsessions are recurrent thoughts or feelings that come into the mind seemingly involuntarily. Sufferers regard these thoughts as senseless or sometimes unpleasant, but are unable to ignore them. Thoughts of violence, fears of being infected with germs or dirt and constant doubts (Did I shut the door?) are most common.

Compulsions are repetitive, apparently purposeful acts that are carried out in a ritualized fashion. They are performed for the purpose of warding off fears or relieving anxiety. Sufferers do not enjoy performing these compulsions, but feel increasingly anxious if they try to resist.

Compulsive behaviors tend to get in the way and cause problems in the person's life. It may take some people two to three hours to get up in the morning.

Your Personal Evaluation of OCD

The following chart can help you distinguish between what is considered OCD and what are just normal human quirks.

	What OCD is	What OCD is NOT
Adults	A man who washes his hands 100 or more times until they are raw.	A woman who unfailingly washes her hands before every meal.
Children	A boy who is late for school every day because he must wash his hair six times in the shower.	A girl who spends twenty minutes washing and styling her hair.
Adults	A woman who locks and relocks her door for half an hour.	A woman who double checks that her door and windows are locked each night before going to bed.
Children	A child who checks over and over that the light switch is in the off position, even though it is obvious the light is off.	A child who double checks that the light is off as she leaves her room.
Adults	A man who stores 19 years of newspapers with no system of filing or retrieval.	A woman who dedicates all her spare time and money on building an art collection.
Children	A child who collects used matches as a protection against his house burning down.	A child whose bedroom wall is covered with pennants of all his favorite sports teams.
Adults	A college student who must tap on the doorframe of every classroom six times before entering.	A musician who practices a difficult passage over and over again until it sounds great.
Children	A seven-year-old girl who can't stop skipping over cracks in the sidewalk until she has done it 19 times.	A young girl who laughs with friends while skipping over cracks in the sidewalk reciting "step on a crack break your mother's back".
Adults	A woman who spends hours alphabetizing every item in her kitchen cabinets.	An office manager who won't leave the office until his desk is clear and the in-box is empty.
Children	A fifth grade boy who cannot leave the gym until the laces of his sneakers are tied with loops the exact same size.	A teenager who enjoys arranging groceries on store shelves as his first part time job.

Source: *Pharmacia & Upjohn, Inc. and Cruz Clinic*

If you are concerned that you or your child may have OCD, please feel free to give us a call. We can help answer questions and get you in touch with someone who can help.