

Some Thoughts on Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

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Obsessive compulsive disorder was once considered a hopeless, untreatable psychiatric illness. Within the past fifteen years, however, there has been huge progress in the effective treatment of OCD. OCD can co-exist along with other disorders such as Depression or any of the addictions (alcoholism, drug dependency, eating disorders, etc.). Considerable clinical and scientific evidence demonstrates that cognitive-behavioral therapy combined with medications is the most effective treatment.

THE OCD “PROFILE”

Impressionistically, OCD individuals are very wound up and tense. They appear to be almost continually in a state of high stress—hurried or “speeded up” to the point where they can’t relax or slow down. Accompanying this state of high tension is a tendency to be very out of touch with their bodies and their feelings. Sufferers from this disorder are most often very intelligent and tend to spend a lot of time ruminating in their heads, at the expense of being centered and relaxed in their bodies and able to experience their feelings. Because of this, OCD sufferers do not experience sensitization to external situations, as does the phobic, but rather to *their own internal thoughts, sensations or impulses*. While many people with OCD may appear to be sensitized to external situations, such as dirty objects or stoves that are left unchecked, what they are actually sensitized to is the *idea* of dirt or the *idea of something left unchecked*. Distraction and performing rituals are probably the most common recourses taken. Both can be helpful for a while but the intrusive thoughts have a tendency to come back.

SOME LIFESTYLE CHANGES THAT ARE HELPFUL FOR OCD:

Attempt to slow down and pace yourself. Back off from always keeping busy and give yourself more time for rest, relaxation and recreation.

Recreation should consist of activities that you find genuinely enjoyable. Take more vacations. Stop driving and pushing yourself.

Engage in activities that help you to be more in touch with your physical body. A regular exercise program, yoga, martial arts, dancing or gardening, practiced on a regular basis, can be very helpful. All of these activities will help you to feel more “grounded” and in your body. This, in turn, will reduce your tendency to become sensitized to your inner thoughts and impulses.

Be willing to experience your feelings. You can learn to be more aware of your feelings by slowing down enough so that you can live more in the present moment instead of in your thoughts. You can begin to bring out your feeling by writing them down or sharing them on a regular basis with someone you trust. Simple *willingness* to be more available to experience your feelings is the first step.

Overcome isolation. Social isolation tends to aggravate obsessions and compulsions, whereas connecting with, and feelings close to, other people will tend to reduce the problem because it brings you more into the present. If you’re dealing with OCD and you find you spend a lot of time alone, work on increasing your support system and make time to be with people. If you are already with someone a lot of the time, work on upgrading your level of closeness with that person.

Postpone obsessing. You decide to delay obsessing for just 30 seconds or a minute, then gradually increase the length of time.

Creative distractions. Find an interesting distraction to focus on and divert your mind from negative obsessive thoughts. Good reading material, tapes, or a conversation with a friend works well, as does indoor/outdoor physical exercise.

For more ideas on how to manage OCD in your life the following books are good resources:

The OCD Workbook. By Hyman, Bruce and Pedrick, Cherry. New Harbinger Publications. 1999.

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook. By Bourne, Edmund. New Harbinger Publications. 1999.

