

BREAKING THE

ILLIENCE



OCD Chicago



SILENT SUFFERERS

These people suffer from the devastating effects of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), a neurobiological disorder that affects men, women, and children of all races, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. OCD strikes an estimated six to nine million Americans, or between 2% and 3% of the population. That's about one in every 40 adults and one in 100 school-aged children. It's the fourth most common psychiatric diagnosis and ranks among the top 10 leading causes of disability worldwide. Some experts call OCD the "hidden epidemic." Its economic impact is estimated as \$8.4 billion per year.

People with OCD endure unwanted and intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and/or ritualistic behaviors or mental acts (compulsions) that they are driven to perform over and over. They experience OCD as being stuck in an unending loop of anxiety. People with OCD know their obsessions and compulsions are irrational and excessive, yet they cannot control them.

Too often, people with OCD suffer in silence because they are ashamed and because they do not realize that they have a real and treatable disorder. Exhausted by time-consuming rituals and efforts to hide their symptoms, they frequently suffer from serious depression. The stress of untreated OCD can destroy lives.

OCD Chicago is dedicated to providing people with OCD and their families the support and compassion they need and deserve.

Michael, 42, ENGINEER

Michael is a successful businessman, but he's often late to work because he has trouble leaving his home each morning. He checks and rechecks his stove burners, appliances, and door locks. While performing his checking, he repeats certain words to try to ease his anxiety. He gets up earlier and earlier in an effort to leave on time, but the checking only worsens. Michael's colleagues have no idea that he experiences this torment at home.

Laurie, 26, PHOTOGRAPHER

Laurie, a talented artist, suffers from a persistent fear of dirt. Everything feels contaminated, and she can't stop thinking about germs. Washing her hands involves an elaborate, time-consuming ritual. The chemicals she must use in her darkroom trigger nearly unbearable anxiety. She spends hours each day cleaning every inch of her kitchen and bathroom with ammonia. Laurie rarely picks up her camera any more.

Casey, 11, FIFTH GRADER

Casey was a straight-A student, but now he is having problems at school. He's so focused on arranging and rearranging his pencils and notebooks on his desk that he cannot pay attention in class. And he rarely finishes an exam because he spends so much time writing his answers, erasing them, and rewriting them over and over until they're "perfect." Casey's parents and teachers do not understand what's happening to him. Neither does he.

OCD'S SYMPTOMS

OCD is characterized by obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors that can occupy many hours of each day. In severe cases, OCD can completely monopolize a person's life.

COMMON OBSESSIONS

- Fear of contamination
- Fear of causing harm to others
- Fear of making a mistake
- Fear of loss
- Need to have things symmetrical or 'just right'
- Excessive doubt
- Abhorrent sexual or religious thoughts

COMMON COMPULSIONS

- Cleaning/washing
- Checking
- Arranging/organizing
- Hoarding
- Counting/repeating
- Persistent requests for reassurance

Impairment from OCD ranges from mild to extreme. Sometimes the symptoms are crippling, making regular employment or school impossible and endangering relationships. In the most severe cases, hospitalization may be necessary. On the other hand, many people manage to continue functioning in their daily activities despite their constant battle with this disorder. Yet they are frequently miserable, hiding their symptoms and suffering while the disorder takes its toll on their happiness, productivity, and the quality of their family life and friendships.

IS IT OCD?

Most people have experienced a fleeting compulsion — to double check the stove or door lock when leaving home, for example. To meet the clinical definition of OCD, however, obsessions and compulsions must take up significant time (more than an hour a day) and significantly interfere with a person's daily life, occupation, academic performance, and/or social relationships.

If you recognize the symptoms in yourself, a spouse, child, friend, patient, or co-worker, what you see may be OCD. Identifying the symptoms is the first step to getting appropriate care.

THE ROOTS OF OCD

OCD symptoms can start any time — in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood — and they can appear either suddenly or gradually. OCD symptoms tend to vary in intensity over time, and many people with OCD find that without treatment the disorder continues to worsen. Far too often, people with OCD suffer in silence, unaware that their symptoms are caused by a neurobiological problem, and that treatment is available.

Using a special type of brain scan called positron emission tomography (PET), scientists have shown that functioning in some areas of the brain is different between people who have OCD and those who don't. Research shows that the disorder may involve communication errors that take place between the orbitofrontal cortex (front part of brain) and the basal ganglia and thalamus (deeper parts of the brain). Abnormalities in the serotonin and other neurotransmitter systems — chemicals that send messages between brain cells — may be at the root of the disorder.

A DNA study funded by the National Institutes of Health suggests that OCD and certain related psychiatric disorders may be associated with an uncommon mutation of the human serotonin transporter (hSERT) gene. People with particularly severe OCD symptoms may have a second variation in the same gene. Insights gained from these and other studies could lead to the development of laboratory tests that identify mental illness as well as effective new treatments.

Research indicates that about 25% of OCD sufferers have an immediate family member with the disorder, which strongly suggests a genetic component to OCD.

While stress does not cause OCD, a stressful event like the death of a loved one, birth of a child, divorce, or other trauma can trigger the onset of the disorder or make existing symptoms worse.

TREATMENT WORKS

While there is no cure for OCD, there is highly effective treatment in the form of cognitive behavior therapy and medication. Some experts believe that a combination of these treatments leads to the best results for the majority of OCD sufferers.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY

Scientific evidence shows that a specific form of cognitive behavior therapy called exposure and response prevention (ERP) is the most effective type of therapy for OCD. It is recommended by nationally recognized institutions such as the National Institute of Mental Health, Mayo Clinic and Harvard Medical School. This treatment puts participants in situations that expose them to their obsessions and gradually prevents them from performing the compulsions they use to ease the accompanying anxiety. For most people, anxiety levels go down dramatically. For some, their anxiety actually disappears.

While symptoms are rarely eliminated on a permanent basis, intervention can reduce symptoms dramatically and provide lasting benefits.

Most ERP treatment is conducted on an outpatient basis. In severe cases, however, some people may require inpatient treatment. Not all mental health professionals are trained in ERP; it is important to seek a treatment provider who is. For a list of treatment providers in the Chicago area, contact OCD Chicago.

Traditional psychotherapy (or "talk" therapy) is not effective in treating this disorder.

MEDICATION

A class of medication known as serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SRIs) is considered effective for treating OCD. While selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) affect the neurotransmitter serotonin, nonselective SRIs affect multiple neurotransmitters. Benefits of available medications will vary from person to person.

Medication can help lower the level of anxiety associated with obsessions and reduce the urge to perform compulsive rituals. While most people on appropriate medication enjoy some relief from their symptoms, very few people find that medication alone eliminates their symptoms completely.

OCD CHICAGO: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

OCD Chicago serves adults and children with OCD, their families, and the mental health professionals who treat them. It is the only Chicago area organization solely dedicated to the growing needs of the OCD community. Our mission is to increase public and professional awareness of OCD, educate and support people with OCD and their families, and encourage research into new treatments and a cure.

Increased media attention on brain disorders such as OCD has caused requests for our services to rise to a new level. OCD Chicago reaches out with compassion and encouragement to assure people with OCD that they are not alone and help them to manage the disorder.

We are a volunteer-based, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with an active agenda:

Consumer education and support We provide OCD sufferers and their families with the latest information on this disorder, referrals to local treatment providers and support groups, and an opportunity to discuss their options with an OCD-knowledgeable person.

Our popular publications, *Relief from OCD*, *How to Help Your Child: A Parent's Guide to OCD*, *Got OCD? A Guide for Teens*, and *Overcoming OCD: A Guide for College Students*, offer encouraging and practical steps to improve the lives of adults and children who are affected. Our guides are distributed free of charge to individuals and families concerned about OCD, as well as to treatment providers, educators and clergy.

Professional education We offer mental health professionals opportunities to increase their knowledge of OCD and improve their abilities to treat patients effectively.

Public awareness We supply speakers for schools, public forums, and the news media to help increase understanding about OCD. Our OCD in the Classroom program is particularly effective for teaching school personnel about the disorder.

Our web sites (www.ocdchicago.org and www.ocdeducationstation.org) offer detailed, current information about OCD for consumers, educators and professionals, as well as events of interest to the OCD community.



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