



## OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER – DO YOU NEED TO CHECK IF YOU HAVE IT... AND CHECK AGAIN?

Do you wash or clean a lot? Do you check things a lot? Are you concerned about orderliness or symmetry? Are you bothered by thoughts that do not make sense and keep coming back to you even when you try not to have them? Is there anything that you do over and over again and cannot resist doing such as repeatedly washing your hands, counting up to a certain number or checking something several times to make sure you have done it right?

If you answered “yes” to a number of these questions, you may be one of the 4% of people who have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD.

The cause of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is mostly genetic; it runs in families.

### How OCD presents itself

The condition usually starts showing around the ages of 10-24. First the person gets obsessions, which are distressing unwanted ideas, images, or impulses that enter the person’s mind. Then the compulsion follows. This is a repetitive, stereotyped behaviour or mental acts that are driven by rules that must be rigidly applied. They are needed to relieve the anxiety created by the obsession.

Here is an example: *Every night, a woman sufferer needs to check that she has locked the back door – about hundred times, because she is just not satisfied. Or a school boy needs to count every piece of wood in any picket fences as he walks home from school.*

Essentially, the anxiety created by the obsessional thought is relieved by the compulsive behaviour, so the behaviour must occur.

OBSESSIONS	RELATED COMPULSIONS
Fear of contamination	Washing, cleaning
Need for symmetry, precise arranging	Ordering, arranging, balancing, straightening until it is “just right”
Unwanted sexual or aggressive thoughts or images	Checking, praying “undoing” actions, asking for reassurance
Doubts, e.g. are the gas jets off and doors locked	Repeated checking behaviours
Concern about throwing something valuable away	Hoarding
Other concerns	List making, touching or tapping objects

## OCD and associated disorders

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is often accompanied by other mental health conditions. The most common are:

- Depression – 55%
- Panic Disorder – 35%
- Phobias – 24%
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder – 20%
- Body Dysmorphic disorder (distorted image of your body shape) – 15%

Other related conditions are:

- Trichotillomania (compulsive pulling out of hair on head)
- Hypochondriasis (compulsive illness behaviour when there is not really an illness – these people go to doctors a lot and end up with many unnecessary operations)
- Anorexia Nervosa
- Tourette's Syndrome
- ADHD
- Substance abuse
- Eating Disorder
- Schizophrenia

In children, more males and can have ADHD and Tourettes associated with it.

## Treating Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

What is important about all of this is that because sufferers and their families don't know that they have OCD, there is a great delay in getting help.

A psychiatrist should be involved in the treatment of OCD. Treatment can include medicine such as Prozac as well as cognitive behaviour therapy.

Sufferers also have a support group in New Zealand – [www.o.cd.org.nz](http://www.o.cd.org.nz)