

Top Tips for Overcoming OCD

Understand Your Rituals

Rituals are misleading. It seems like you have to do them to prevent bad things from happening (e.g. checking the stove five times to make sure the house doesn't burn down), but performing the ritual actually stops you from learning that even without your ritual, the outcome you feared wouldn't have happened. Rituals might help you to feel less anxious at the time, but they do little to help in the longer-term and actually strengthen your anxiety.

Change Your Rituals

Resisting your OCD will help you to overcome it. It might seem like rituals help you to manage your anxiety, but they end up taking up more and more time and cause considerable distress. Not performing your rituals can seem daunting so it's best to do it gradually. Start with a ritual you think will be easiest to change and set yourself a goal. Ideally you're aiming to not perform the ritual at all, but if this is too challenging try: gradually reducing the time you allow yourself to perform the ritual, changing the order of your ritual, or delaying your ritual for longer periods of time. With repeated practice your anxiety should lessen and it should take less time for your anxiety to pass.

Understand Your Obsessions

We're constantly thinking. At times we experience 'intrusive' thoughts, thoughts that pop into your head at random. These thoughts can be distressing, for example a random thought about your own funeral or images of a loved one jumping in front of an oncoming car. No-one knows why the mind works like this, but we know from research that everyone experiences intrusive thoughts, even people without OCD. What makes someone with OCD different from someone without OCD is that OCD will make you feel that your intrusive thoughts are dangerous and threatening when they're not.

See Your Thoughts Differently

Trying not to have intrusive thoughts unfortunately doesn't work, in fact it makes it worse (try not to think about a pink elephant). Instead of trying to ignore your intrusive thoughts, acknowledge them for what they are, random brain activity.

Challenge Your Thoughts

Write your anxious thoughts down on a piece of paper and ask: Am I being realistic or is my OCD making me over-estimate the likelihood of something bad happening? Is my OCD making me feel responsible when I'm not? Is my OCD making me believe that thinking something is the same as doing it? Is my OCD making me doubt myself – is there any reason to? Changing your thinking is hard, but challenging your thoughts will help you resist your OCD.

OCD

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD is an anxiety disorder associated with unwanted and intrusive thoughts or mental images (also known as obsessions) and rituals (also called compulsions).

Obsessions nearly always relate to negative, distressing events and can include anything from:

- Thoughts about illness or contamination
- Sexual or aggressive images
- Excessive worry about doing something wrong
- Worry that you've forgotten to do something (e.g. turn off the iron)

Compulsions are the rituals someone with OCD feels compelled to perform to stop the anxiety or prevent a feared outcome, like death or illness. Some common compulsions are:

- Hand washing
- Having to repeat an action a certain number of times
- Needing things in a specific order
- Needing to check things over and over

The tips on this sheet cover some of the ways you can manage OCD – if things don't improve speak to your GP about seeing a clinical psychologist