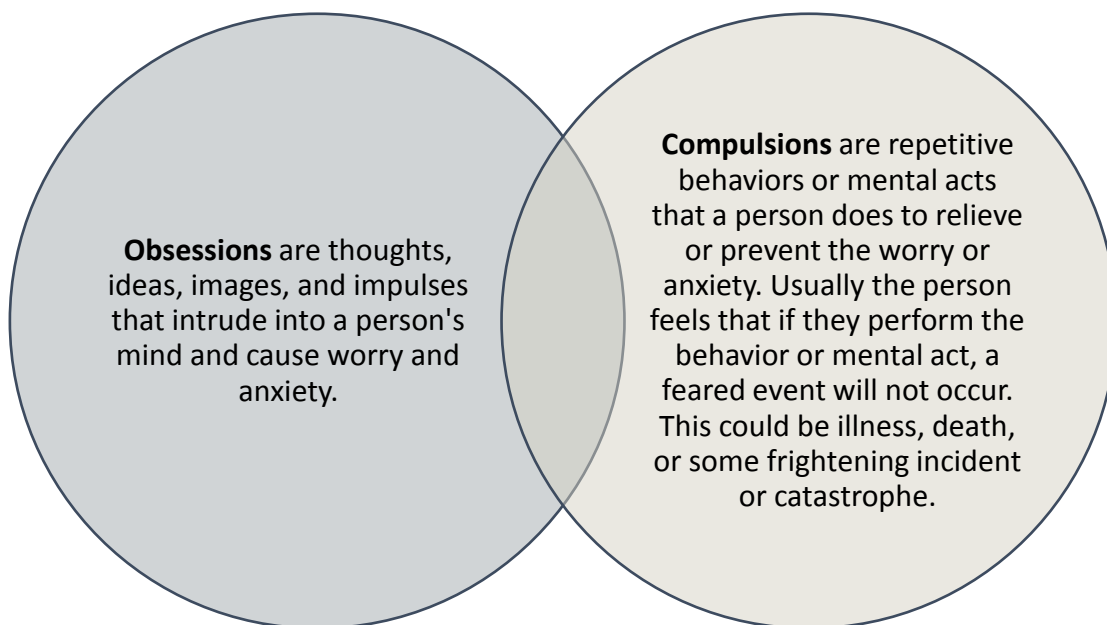




# Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Many of us have routines that we engage in daily. **Habits** are often, but not always, enjoyable. When habitual behaviors make us feel good, we are more likely to repeat them for that good feeling. For example, we all know that exercise is good for our health. When we get into the habit of exercising, we may find we enjoy it more. Continuing a habit of exercising is reinforced.

**Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** is a disorder characterized by distressing thoughts that are often linked to habitual behaviors performed to stop the distressing thoughts.



- If engaging in certain behaviors takes more than one hour per day and interferes with daily functioning, a person might have OCD. These behaviors must cause distress to the person, who at some point realizes that these compulsions are excessive and unreasonable behaviors.
- 1 out of 40 people suffer from OCD.
- Symptoms can flair up or worsen when there is significant stress or change in a person's life.
- There is increasing evidence that OCD is caused by problems with chemistry of the brain. Sufferers usually have a family history of anxiety.

**Treatment for OCD often includes Exposure and Response Prevention. By exposing the person to a feared situation, their brain "gets used to it" and realizes that the feared outcome does not actually happen.**

Here are some types of OCD obsessions and compulsions:

**“Checking”**

**Obsession:** A person fears being responsible for something awful happening if their actions are not checked.

**Compulsions:** Checking for safety of physical surroundings; physical health; that they did not cause harm to self, others; that they did not make a mistake; that nothing terrible happened.

**“Washing/Cleaning”**

**Obsession:** Harm will come to self or others by way of germs, dirt, viruses, foreign substances.

**Compulsions:** Excessive, uncontrollable washing; excessive grooming; cleaning of objects; avoidance of objects or places considered contaminated; use of gloves.

**“Ordering”**

**Obsession:** Something bad will happen if one does not get it "right."

**Compulsions:** Belongings have certain order, placement; counting, arranging belongings; repeating routine activities.

**“Hoarding”**

**Obsession:** Believing that a discarded item may be needed some day, could be used for something; thinking the discarded item might feel "rejected" as if it were a person.

**Compulsions:** Save useless items; pick up discarded items from the ground

**“Scrupulosity”**

**Obsession:** Worry and preoccupation with being moral, ethical.

**Compulsions:** Needing to confess "bad" thoughts; seek reassurance that thoughts are "okay."

**“Obsessional”**

**Obsession:** The experiencing of unwanted, intrusive, horrific thoughts about causing harm to others.

**Compulsions:** Repetitive review of situations to relieve anxiety; prayer; counting; repeating certain words or songs; mental rituals.

Source: *The OCD Workbook: Your Guide to Breaking Free from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*, by Bruce M. Hyman, Ph.D. and Cherry Pedrick, RN



Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS)

3 Garrison Avenue, Smith Hall - 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Durham, NH 03824

Tel: 603-862-2090 Website: [www.unh.edu/pacs](http://www.unh.edu/pacs)