



BalanceWorks® Newsletter

August 2011 | Written by the work/life experts at **eni**



Understanding Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

"Jenny always goes to the same beauty salon; she's so OCD about her hair"

"Sam, you are really OCD about planning parties, you're such a perfectionist"

"We better leave early, you know how John's OCD about being on time"

It is quite common to hear the term OCD, which stands for obsessive compulsive disorder, used in jest when referring to people's quirks and idiosyncrasies. In reality, the examples above do not refer to people who actually have OCD, just to someone who really cares about her hair, someone who is a great event planner, and someone who prefers to be on time! Since referring to people as OCD has recently become part of pop culture, it seems fitting to educate people about the reality of the disorder, so they can recognize it and seek treatment if there really is an issue.

Obsessive compulsive disorder is a potentially disabling type of anxiety disorder that affects approximately 3.3 million adults and about 1 million

children in the US. People with OCD are consumed with unreasonable obsessions, which are typically upsetting thoughts, images, or fears. The feelings that these obsessions produce then lead to the compulsions, which are ritualistic actions intended to get rid of the obsessive thoughts or feelings. The problem is that these compulsions only relieve the obsession temporarily. Soon enough the obsessive thoughts return, again prompting the compulsion, which serves to trap the OCD afflicted person in an endless obsessive compulsive cycle.

The symptoms of OCD, which are the obsessions and compulsions themselves vary, but there are a few common themes that are found quite frequently in those who have the disorder:

Obsession – Extreme fear of germs or contamination

Compulsion – Excessively showering or washing hands as well as refusing to shake hands or touch public objects like doorknobs

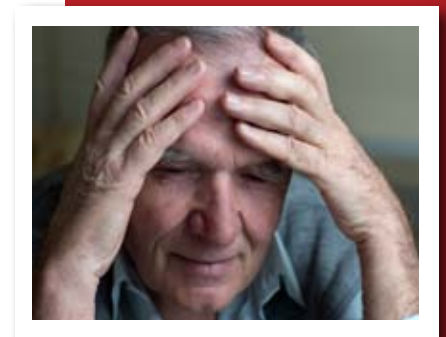
Obsession – Fear of death when you are not chronically ill

Compulsion – Repeatedly visiting the doctor to have the same tests performed just to re-assure yourself

For more information or support on obsessive compulsive disorder, contact the work/life experts at **BalanceWorks®** by calling:

1.800.327.2255

eni's BalanceWorks® program is a confidential 24/7 service provided by your employer to help achieve work/life balance.





Obsession – Fear of making a mistake
Compulsion – Demanding constant reassurance from those around you or refusal to make any decisions

Obsession – Extreme need for order, precision, and symmetry
Compulsion – Constantly counting and arranging objects

Obsession – Continuously doubting yourself and worrying that you will cause harm or damage
Compulsion – Repeatedly making sure that the stove is off, that the door is locked, that a friend is not angry with you, etc.

For some people their OCD is so severe that it dramatically lowers their quality of life. They are so consumed by their obsessions that they spend the vast majority of their time focusing on completing their ritualistic compulsions, instead of enjoying life and connecting with friends and family.

Typically, OCD first presents in childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood. Unfortunately, the exact cause of OCD is not yet fully understood. However, research strongly suggests that an insufficient level of serotonin, a neurotransmitter in the brain may contribute to the disorder. In addition, certain environmental factors including abuse, grief, illness, difficult relationships, and trouble with work or school, can trigger OCD in people who are predisposed to developing it. Interestingly, the vast majority of people with OCD are well aware that their thoughts and subsequent behaviors are completely irrational; they just feel that they cannot control them. Although it is frustrating to be fully aware that you are behaving unreasonably, by accepting that this is an issue you are empowered to seek help.

Luckily, the outlook for people suffering from OCD is very good once they find the therapy that works for them. Treatment

for OCD includes medication or behavioral therapy and often a combination of both. Certain antidepressants that interact with patient's serotonin can be effective in treating OCD. The most effective form of therapy for people suffering from OCD is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. The goal of this therapy is to teach people to confront the fears associated with their obsessions without performing the ritualistic compulsions. By confronting their fears in a controlled environment, they are able to see that nothing bad will happen to them or anyone else if they do not perform the behavior associated with their compulsion. This therapy also focuses on controlling and reducing the catastrophic thinking that is associated with the obsession. Over time the compulsions will become less intense and eventually the obsession will begin to subside as well.

It is important to remember that being a "perfectionist" or "being set in your ways" does not mean that you have OCD. Most people have some ingrained habits and eccentricities that may seem odd to others but in no way negatively affect their quality of life. However, if you do find yourself becoming consumed with repetitive thoughts and feeling compelled to perform certain actions; you may want to consult with a behavioral health specialist who can assess the situation. With OCD the sooner you seek treatment the more effective it is!

For more information about obsessive compulsive disorder contact the work/life experts at BalanceWorks® by calling

1.800.327.2255

eni's BalanceWorks® program is a confidential 24/7 service provided by your employer to help achieve work/life balance.