Top Treatment and Coping Options for OCD

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How to Get Rid of OCD

Obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, is an anxiety disorder that affects approximately 2% of the population. OCD is characterized by unwanted, intrusive thoughts and fears (obsessions) paired with repetitive behaviors (compulsions). Due to this, some people may wonder about how to get rid of OCD. We will cover some treatments and coping techniques in this article.

People should know that the pattern of obsessions and compulsions often cause distress, significantly interfering with the activities of daily life. Often, the more an obsession is ignored, the stronger the associated compulsion may become.

Understanding OCD

OCD generally involves both obsessions and compulsions. However, it is possible to only have one or the other. As such, the most common symptoms of OCD can be broken down between two categories: obsession and compulsion.

Obsession Symptoms

Intrusive, persistent and unwanted thoughts, urges or images that cause distress or anxiety are correlated with OCD. Most obsessions have themes or topics, such as:

- Fear of contamination or dirt.
- Perfectionism, requiring order and symmetry.
- Losing control or difficulty in tolerating uncertainty.
- Unwanted thoughts of an aggressive or sexual nature.
- Thoughts of harming yourself or others, or the fear of causing a catastrophic event.

Examples of obsession symptoms include the fear that you forgot to turn off the stove or lock the door, or intrusive images of driving your car into oncoming traffic.

Compulsion Symptoms

Repetitive behaviors where you feel forced or driven to perform are associated with OCD. You may feel the need to act on these compulsions to reduce the anxiety related to your obsessions or prevent something bad from occurring.

Engaging in these compulsions may offer only temporary relief from anxiety and often become excessive. Compulsions may or may not be realistically related to the obsession that they are intended to alleviate.

Most compulsions also have themes, such as:

- Counting.
- Following a strict routine.
- Checking and double-checking.
- Washing and cleaning.
- Orderliness.
- Demanding reassurance.

Examples of compulsion symptoms include continually checking doors to see if they are locked or washing your hands until your skin becomes raw.

Treatment Options

Medications for OCD

Antidepressants – specifically selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) – are commonly used to treat OCD, as they can reduce obsessive behaviors and compulsions.

Some examples of prescribed SSRIs for OCD include:

- Fluoxetine (Prozac).
- Sertraline (Zoloft).
- Fluvoxamine (Luvox).
- Paroxetine (Paxil).
- Escitalopram (Lexapro).

The goal of any prescribed medication is to effectively control the symptoms of OCD, using the lowest possible dose. This process can take time, as many individuals must try a variety of medications before finding one (or a combination of medications) that work well.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Psychotherapy, especially cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), is an effective form of therapy in the treatment of OCD. CBT will help to change the way that you think, feel and behave by re-evaluating the consequences of engaging in obsessions or compulsions.

A component of CBT called exposure and response prevention (ERP) gradually exposes you to situations and objects that trigger fear and anxiety (i.e., obsessions). Through ERP, you will learn ways to resist the compulsions brought on by that situation or object.

ERP allows you to manage your obsessions and compulsions in a safe space, under the guidance of a professional. Through habituation, this repeated exposure will lead to a decrease in anxiety.

Can OCD Be Cured?

The treatment options available for OCD are not considered to be cures. However, regular treatment can help bring symptoms under control. Depending on the severity of your condition, long-term, ongoing, or more intensive treatment may be necessary.

The most effective treatments for OCD involve the combination of medication with CBT. Treatment is an ongoing process, but if done properly, the symptoms of OCD should no longer continually disrupt your daily life.

Effective Coping Mechanisms

Coping with OCD is challenging, as long-term treatment is usually required. However, there are some things you can do for yourself as part of your treatment plan:

- **Learn about OCD:** Learning about your condition can empower and motivate you to continue with treatment, even when it is difficult.
- **Support groups:** Joining an OCD support group may help you cope with your own challenges by reaching out to others who can better understand your situation.
- **Stress management:** Practicing meditation, visualization, deep breathing, yoga, or tai chi can help you relax and learn to better manage stress.
- **Healthy outlets:** Channel your energy into hobbies, sports, or other recreational activities to ensure you are getting the exercise you need to stay healthy.
- **Recovery goals:** As treatment for OCD is often long-term, develop a list of recovery goals that you can focus on throughout the process.
- **Live your life:** OCD can significantly disrupt your daily life if you let it. Combat this by spending time with friends and family, going to work or school and choosing not to avoid your regular activities.

If you are struggling to cope with OCD, reach out to your medical professional for help in constructing a treatment plan that works for you.