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Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is characterized by uncontrollable obsessions and compulsions which the sufferer usually recognizes as being excessive or unreasonable. Obsessions are recurring thoughts or impulses that are intrusive or inappropriate and cause the sufferer anxiety. Some common obsessions are:

- Thoughts about contamination, for example, when an individual fears coming into contact with dirt, germs or "unclean" objects;
- Persistent doubts, for example, whether or not one has turned off the iron or stove, locked the door or turned on the answering machine;
- Extreme need for orderliness;
- Aggressive impulses or thoughts, for example, being overcome with the urge to yell 'fire' in a crowded theater

Compulsions are repetitive behaviors or rituals performed by the OCD sufferer, performance of these rituals neutralize the anxiety caused by obsessive thoughts, relief is only temporary. Compulsions are incorporated into the person's daily routine and are not always directly related to the obsessive thought, for example, a person who has aggressive thoughts may count floor tiles in an effort to control the thought. Some of the most common compulsions are:

- **Cleaning.** Sufferers concerned with germs and contamination tend to clean constantly, either repeatedly washing their hands, showering, or constantly cleaning their home;
- **Checking.** Individuals may check several or even hundreds of times to make sure that stoves are turned off and doors are locked;
- **Repeating.** Some repeat a name, phrase or action over and over;
- **Slowness.** Some individuals may take an excessively slow and methodical approach to daily activities, they may spend hours organizing and arranging objects;
- **Hoarding.** Hoarders are unable to throw away useless items, such as old newspapers, junk mail, even broken appliances; sometimes the hoarding reaches the point that whole rooms are filled with saved items.

In order for OCD to be diagnosed, the obsessions and/or compulsions must take up a considerable amount of the sufferers time, at least one hour every day, and interfere with normal routines (a person, for example, who cannot make left turns when driving), occupational functioning, social activities, or relationships. OCD can interfere with one's ability to concentrate, and it is not uncommon for a sufferer to avoid certain situations, for example, someone who is obsessed with cleanliness may be unable to use public restrooms.

Onset of OCD is usually gradual and most often begins in adolescence or early adulthood. Unlike adults, children with OCD do not realize that their obsessions and compulsions, which are most often of the washing, checking, and ordering variety, are excessive.

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