

# Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD affects 2 - 3 % of the population - more than 500,000 Australians. OCD is the fourth most common psychiatric disorder, after phobias, substance abuse and major depression.

Many people experience obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours. A diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder will only be made if these thoughts and behaviours are:

- time consuming (ie, occur for more than one hour a day);
- are recognised as excessive and unreasonable;
- cause significant distress;
- and interfere with a person's normal routine, occupational or academic functioning or social activities and relationships.

**Obsessions** are recurrent and persistent thoughts, impulses, or images that are experienced as intrusive and inappropriate, and are not simply excessive worries about real life problems.

**Compulsions** are repetitive behaviours or mental acts that are performed in response to an obsession, or according to rigid rules, and are aimed at reducing distress or preventing a dreaded event.

*(Definitions from – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4<sup>th</sup> Edition), American Psychiatric Association, 1994).*

## An OCD Check List

The following list describes common obsessions and compulsions experienced by people with OCD.

Tick those which you feel may apply to you.

### Common Obsessions

- "I am afraid of getting dirty or being infected by germs."
- "I am afraid of getting AIDS. I am afraid that I have AIDS."
- "I am always concerned about poisons and other toxic substances."
- "I am terrified that something might harm myself or my family."
- "I worry that I might be violent and hurt someone."
- "I am guilty and ashamed about my blasphemous religious thoughts and perverse sexual thoughts".
- "I am always thinking about certain words, numbers, sounds or images".
- "I am very concerned about objects being placed in a certain order or arrangement".

### Common Compulsions

- "I have to do many normal routine actions in rituals – a certain number of times or according to specific rules"
- "I have to wash my hands, or shower, or brush my teeth over and over again".
- "I have to clean my home and household items excessively".
- "I have to repeat routine activities over and over".
- "I have to arrange things in a certain order".
- "I have to repeat words or phrases, or count up to a certain number".
- "When I have a 'bad' thought, I have to replace it with a 'good' thought".
- "I can't throw out things, such as old newspapers, magazines, containers, books and clothes".
- "I have to repeatedly ask other people for reassurance that something has or has not happened".
- "I have to constantly ask questions or confess about 'bad' things I think I have done."
- "I have to move in a special pattern, or touch or tap things in a particular way or a certain number of times."
- "I have constant doubts as to whether I have locked the door or turned off an electrical or gas appliance and so I have to check over and over again".
- "If I drive over a bump on the road, I have to stop the car and get out to check that I have not hurt or killed a person or animal."
- "I try to avoid any situations, objects, people or places may trigger my fears and rituals".

**If you have ticked one or more of these obsessions and compulsions consult your doctor for advice and assistance, and ring the Anxiety Recovery Centre Victoria's *OCD & Anxiety HelpLine* 03 9886 9377 or 1300 ANXIETY / 1300 269 438 for further information, referral and support.**