OCD in one page

What it is

What is OCD?

OCD is a condition where unwanted thoughts, images or urges keep forcing their way into your mind, and you feel driven to do something, visibly or in your head, to make them go away. It is not tidiness and it is not a personality quirk. In the national survey about 3.6 per cent of Australian adults met the criteria in a year.

The signs

What are the symptoms of OCD?

OCD has two parts. Obsessions are unwanted thoughts, images or urges that keep coming back and cause fear or distress. Compulsions are things you feel driven to do, visibly or in your head, to ease it. Together they take up a lot of time.

How a diagnosis happens

How do I get help for OCD?

Start with your usual GP. Ask for a Mental Health Treatment Plan and a referral to a psychologist who does exposure and response prevention (ERP), the treatment every guideline names. Medicare rebates up to ten sessions a year. There is no register of who does ERP, so you will need to ask. Free options exist while you look.

Treatment

What is exposure therapy for OCD?

ERP is the therapy every guideline names for OCD. You go towards the thing that sets off the fear (exposure) and then, this is the half that matters, you do not do the ritual that usually follows: no checking, washing, mental replay or asking (response prevention). Done with a trained therapist, it teaches your brain that the alarm passes on its own.

Medication

Do I need medication for OCD?

Not always. The UK guideline this hub relies on says that for mild to moderate OCD, a course of an SSRI antidepressant and a course of therapy with ERP appear to work comparably well, so you get a choice. For severe OCD it recommends both together. Medication is one of two options, not the only one, and taking it is not a weakness.

- Not always it depends on severity

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Who can diagnose OCD, and do I need a psychiatrist?

Usually you do not need a psychiatrist to start. Your GP can make the plan that opens Medicare psychology sessions. A psychiatrist comes in when treatment is not helping enough, or your GP wants a specialist view.

- A psychiatrist assessment pays back $467.45 of $549.90

What it costs

What are my options if I cannot afford a psychologist?

You have free and low-cost options. Medicare Mental Health Centres and the MindSpot OCD course for adults are free. THIS WAY UP's OCD course costs nothing with a clinician's prescription. University training clinics charge a low fixed fee, such as $40 for 50 to 60 minutes at UQ. Bulk billing is up to each practice, so ask before you book.

- Medicare Mental Health Centres are free

Some of this differs by state and territory. See the pages on your state at haihealth.au/blog/ocd.

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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