

COVID-19 and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

The COVID-19 pandemic affects people all around the world. This leaflet was designed to help people with OCD who might experience difficulties during this time. It aims to provide some general information about OCD and to offer some counselling on how to deal with experiences of higher stress in this situation. Notably, people without OCD might also suffer from some form of obsessions/compulsions these days.

What is OCD?

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) affects millions of people worldwide and is characterized by two main problems that usually co-occur (for a detailed description, please see [ICD-10 classification](#)):

- **obsessions** (persistent thoughts, images, urges or doubts that are unwanted, intrusive and appear in your mind repetitively)
- **compulsions** (repetitive activities that a person feels must be performed rigidly even if they do not make sense or are harmful)

To fulfil the diagnostic criteria, obsessions/compulsions need to be characterized as follows and last for a period of at least 2 weeks:

- Obsessions/compulsions are viewed as one's own thoughts or actions and NOT as imposed by other people or external powers.
- The person repeats the thoughts/actions over and over again and perceives this as unpleasant, frightening, or disturbing.
- Obsessions/compulsions affect the general and social function of the affected person.

Obsessions can interrupt your thoughts, are difficult to control, and may make you feel anxious, disgusted or uncomfortable. You might feel you cannot share them with others or that there is something wrong with you that you have to hide. You might feel upset that you are even capable of having such thoughts.

The aim of the **compulsions** is to try and deal with the distress caused by obsessive thoughts. You might have to continue acting compulsively until the stressful feeling or anxiety disappear and things “feel right” again. You might know that it does not make sense to carry out a compulsion - but it can still feel too stressful not to. Compulsions are often very time-consuming and the relief they offer usually does not last very long.

Remember: OCD is not a reflection of your personality! Having OCD does not mean you will be acting on your thoughts! There is effective treatment for OCD! You can get help!

Treatment?

If you have OCD, a significant improvement of your well-being can be achieved with the help of psychotherapy. There is also medication that can help.

- If you are currently being treated for OCD, please stay in contact with your therapist. If you are taking medication for OCD, please take it regularly as prescribed and do not make any changes before talking to your treating physician about it.
- If you are currently not under treatment but have a feeling you should be, you could reach out to a mental health care specialist you already know from a previous treatment. If you do not know how to find a mental health therapist, please check our leaflet “Mental Health Support.”

Dealing with COVID-19

You may be experiencing more difficulties than usual managing your OCD due to the possible anxiety about hygiene. Excessive handwashing might even feel objectively mandatory in times of the COVID pandemic. Here are some tips that can help you better deal with the situation:

- Avoid re-reading the same advice if this proves unhelpful for you.
- Try to limit your contact with news about COVID-19 to once a day and use official sources like the [Swiss Federal Office of Public Health \(FOPH\)](#).
- Let people around you know if you are experiencing difficulties: for example, you could ask them not to remind you to wash your hands.
- Try to only wash your hands for the recommended 20 seconds.
- Plan something to do after finishing handwashing. This could help you change your focus and respect the 20 second limit. You can get inspired reading our leaflet “Staying Home”.
- Try some relaxation techniques like: imagining yourself in a safe place, breathing exercises, PMR (progressive muscle relaxation). More details about these techniques can be found in our other leaflets on the TNU Website.
- Try to maintain physical activity indoors.
- Try to keep a balanced diet and a good sleeping hygiene.

References and Resources

Information in English:

- [Information about OCD](#) provided by the international organisation BeyondOCD.org
- [Information about OCD](#) provided by the organisation Mind (England & Wales)
- [Description of OCD](#) in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10)

Information in German:

- [Information about OCD](#) provided by the *Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Zwangsstörungen*
- [Description of OCD](#) in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10)

Any Questions?

If you have further questions, please see the contact details for mental health support that are listed in our leaflet „[Mental Health Support](#)“, as well as the references and links in this document. Please note that while we select links to external websites carefully, we cannot guarantee for the accuracy or quality of these websites.