

FREE REPORT – OVERCOMING OCD

At least 3% of the population suffers from some form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, that's nearly 2 million people in this country, so if you are a sufferer *you are not alone*.

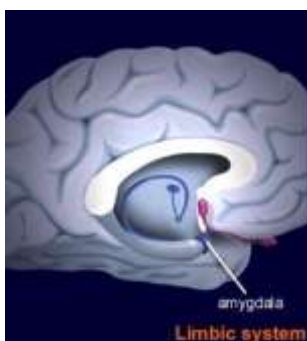
As you are probably well aware, with OCD, frightening, intrusive and repetitive thoughts take over, resulting in the need to perform specific rituals to ward off harm or make things 'all right'. There is a tendency to continually seek reassurance from others. The most common OCD behaviours are repeated hand washing and 'checking' activities, for instance checking that the back door is locked or that the oven is turned off.

The most common trigger for OCD is a steep rise in stress, which could have any number of causes. Maybe your stress levels creep up unnoticed and it is one small, final thing that acts as the proverbial straw that breaks the camels back. Whatever the cause, the result, as you know, is worrisome thoughts: you might fear that a loved one will die or that the house will be repossessed or that you, yourself will inflict harm on someone else. Such thoughts cause great anxiety and gradually a compulsive activity develops, along with the belief that, if the activity is performed the feared event won't happen.

As a sufferer from OCD, you know that what you are doing is irrational, yet this doesn't in any way stop you from carrying out the compulsion, for the fear generated if the ritual cannot be carried out is almost unbearable. And whilst carrying out the ritual, you might well find that you lose all track of time, unaware, for instance, that you have been washing your hands for an hour. **Whilst carrying out the compulsive behaviour you are in a hypnotic trance state.** And in such a state, you may find that you can't remember whether you have carried out the ritual properly, and thus have to repeat it again, and again.

Recent research tells us that even when people without OCD repeatedly check that something important has been done, they become less and less certain that they have actually done it. In other words, repeated checking really does cause memory distrust.

The worst thing, of course, is that carrying out the ritual *doesn't* get rid of the intrusive and frightening thought permanently. Even though OCD sufferers know that, and may constantly tell themselves that they will not perform the compulsive act, they just cannot stop themselves. And this leads us to the amygdala, part of the brain's limbic system, which has a very important role to play in OCD.



OCD is like an addiction

The amygdala is rather like a 'security guard' and it stores our unconscious emotional memories and matches any new experiences to these. If something is recognised as safe - because we have experienced it without any problem before - then all is well and the amygdala/security guard remains relaxed. If a current experience matches one that is perceived as dangerous or life threatening it sets off the fight or flight response and action gets taken.

This is also what happens with the intrusive thought or images; the amygdala recognises a threat and raises the alarm, and so the ritual is initiated, to dissipate it.

And because there is an *expectation* that performing the ritual will deal with the threatening thought, the 'connection' between the two (the thought and the ritual) is embedded all the more deeply. Yet, as we know, the expectation is *not* fulfilled. Although the stress caused by the thought is temporarily reduced after the ritual, the thought soon returns, followed each time by more ritual. So why then does this expectation – that carrying out the ritual will deal with the thought – persist?

Suppose Kate has the repetitive intrusive thought that her son will catch a terrible disease unless she washes her hands twenty times every time she goes to the bathroom. But today, desperate to get free of the compulsion and knowing in her heart of hearts the absurdity of the thought, she firmly resolves not to carry out the ritual next time she has the thought. The part of her brain that makes that decision is technically termed the *dorsolateral prefrontal cortex*. For simplicity, we'll call it 'the boss'. It is the conscious part of the brain, where we make decisions, plan, analyse and organise things.

When the frightening, intrusive thought comes into Kate's mind, her amygdala, the 'security guard', registers it, pattern matches to danger, as usual, and sets off the alarm that usually leads automatically to the hand-washing ritual. But this time, 'the boss' – her conscious mind - says, "No, let's ignore it." At this, the security guard is flabbergasted. It assumes the boss has made a mistake. So it sends an SOS to the part of the brain known as the *anterior cingulate*, which we will call the boss's secretary. (This part of the brain carries out routine tasks that we often don't have to think about too much, such as walking, making a cup of tea, driving on auto-pilot etc.) The message, from the security guard to the boss's secretary, begging to carry out the ritual is sent in a chemical cocktail. This includes a chemical called dopamine, which creates motivation and desire to act.

At this point Kate is experiencing mild anxiety about not having performed the ritual. When the boss's secretary receives the message from the security guard, however, she becomes confused and isn't sure what to do. So, in order to get more information, the secretary sends a message to another part of the brain, the *hippocampus*, the 'memory storeroom', where all conscious memories are held. The boss's secretary requests that the hippocampus sheds light on the current situation.

The hippocampus sends back a 'file' showing how consistently terrible the experience of the intrusive thought has been and how the only way to get it out of the mind and to stop terrible harm from happening has been to carry out the hand-washing ritual.

Horrified at the apparent danger Kate is in, the boss's secretary sends a message to the boss (laced with massive amounts of dopamine) and although the boss (Kate's conscious mind) had resolved not to do the ritual, when she receives the message with all its dopamine, the desire to take action (carry out the ritual) is so overwhelming that she gives in and finds herself washing her hands twenty times again.

The key to recovery from OCD is in changing the dopamine laced expectations.

OCD is exactly like addiction because both involve repeating behaviours that fail to fulfil our expectations. It is the dopamine that deceives us, by making the memory of the experience of carrying out the ritual (or taking heroin or drinking 10 pints of beer) far better than it ever really was. Both rely on magical thinking; life will be wonderful if I have a drink/ get my fix; my son will be safe if I wash my hands twenty times. But rituals don't make the world a safer place, any more than drink or heroin ever really makes life wonderful.

When the amygdala/security guard first gets involved, there is only mild anxiety. *It is only the expectation that dire consequences will follow if Kate doesn't perform the ritual that keeps the whole thing going.* Without that, the anxiety or fear would not be overwhelming and Kate could learn ways to cope with it.

"Before I came to see Gavin most of my time was spent checking things, from spiders in my bedroom, the oven being turned off to doors being locked in the belief that if I did this checking, nothing bad would happen to me or my family. I had suffered with OCD for more than 20 years and the best decision I made was to come to see Gavin. I feel like a new woman! My head is no longer cluttered with 'checking' thoughts and I feel so much more confident in myself and happier. The best thing is I have more time to spend with my family and my children won't grow up watching me checking things, so there's no chance they will copy me."

Name withheld on request.

At **stow-hypno**, using a combination of hypnosis and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy I can help you to re-programme your mind to intervene at the point where the boss's secretary requests memories from the hippocampus – *by calling up very different memories* – (such as, "I feel just as fearful again a few minutes after washing my hands. And I feel full of guilt after doing it, because then I don't have time to do other important things that really matter") that *won't* strike the boss's secretary as necessary to act on. And in that way, she won't bother to send the message to the boss, the conscious mind. By using the very latest therapeutic methods, based on how the brain actually works, you will learn how to first control your responses to the 'OCD Bully' – the thought that tells you to carry out the ritual, otherwise something bad will happen - and then banish it completely. Imagine a life free from OCD...

DON'T LET THE OCD BULLY CONTROL YOU ANY LONGER!

**CALL ME NOW WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR TO BOOK YOUR
FIRST SESSION AND TAKE A GIANT STEP
ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM.**

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