Do you feel trapped in a pattern of unwanted and upsetting thoughts?

A REAL ILLNESS

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder NIH Publication No. 00-4676

Does This Sound Like You?

Do you feel trapped in a pattern of unwanted and upsetting thoughts? Do you feel you have to do the same things over and over again for no good reason? Please put a check in the box next to any problems you have.

- ☐ I have upsetting thoughts or images enter my mind again and again.
- ☐ I feel like I can't stop these thoughts or images, even though I want to.
- ☐ I have a hard time stopping myself from doing things again and again, like: counting, checking on things, washing my hands, re-arranging objects, doing things until it feels right, collecting useless objects
- ☐ I worry a lot about terrible things that could happen if I'm not careful.
- ☐ I have unwanted urges to hurt someone but know I never would.

If you put a check in the box next to some of these problems, you may have **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).**

OCD is a **real** illness that needs to be treated.

It's not your fault if you have this illness, and you don't have to suffer.

Read this booklet and learn how to get help. You **can** feel better and get your life back!

1. What is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)?

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a real illness. It can be treated with medicine and therapy.

If you have OCD, you have repeated, upsetting thoughts. You do the same thing over and over again to make the thoughts go away. You feel like you cannot control these thoughts or actions.

The upsetting thoughts and images are called "obsessions." Examples include a fear of germs, a fear of being hurt, a fear of hurting others, and disturbing religious or sexual thoughts.

The actions you take over and over again to make the thoughts go away are called "compulsions." Examples of these repeated actions include counting, cleaning, and checking on things.

Many people with OCD know that their actions are not normal, and they may try to hide their problem from family and friends. Some people with OCD may have trouble keeping their job and friends because of their actions.

2. When does OCD start and how long does it last?

For many people, OCD starts when a person is a child or teenager. If they do not get help, OCD can last for a lifetime.

OCD may run in families.

3. Am I the only person with this illness?

No. You are not alone. In any year, 3.3 million Americans have OCD.

4. What can I do to help myself?

- Talk to your doctor about your unwanted thoughts, fears, and repeated actions. Tell your doctor if these thoughts and repeated actions keep you from doing everyday things and living your life. You may want to show your doctor this booklet. It can help you explain how you feel. Ask your doctor for a checkup to make sure you don't have some other illness.

- Ask your doctor if he or she has helped people with OCD. Special training helps doctors treat people with OCD. If your doctor doesn't have special training, ask for the name of a doctor or counselor who does.

- Get more information. Call 1-88-88-ANXIETY to have free information mailed to you.

You **can** feel better.

5. What can a doctor or counselor do to help me?

- The doctor may give you medicine to help you get rid of your unwanted thoughts and repeated actions. Medicine can also help you feel less anxious and afraid. But it may take a few weeks for the medicine to work.

- Talking to a specially trained doctor or counselor helps many people with OCD. This is called "therapy." Therapy helps you learn to stop doing the repeated actions. Therapy also teaches to you ways to lower and cope with your anxiety.

OCD can appear in many different ways. Here is one person's story:

"I couldn't touch any doors or countertops in public areas. I knew it didn't make any sense, but I was terrified of getting germs that could kill me. I almost couldn't go out in public, I was so afraid. If I thought I had touched anything, I would have to wash myself for hours. Sometimes I washed so much that my skin would get red and raw and bleed.

"At first I was too embarrassed to get help, but a friend told me to call the doctor. I'm so glad I did. I took medicine my doctor gave me. I also worked very hard in therapy with a counselor. I learned to cope with my fear of germs and to stop washing so much."

Remember – you can get help now:

- Talk to your doctor about your unwanted thoughts and repeated actions.

- Call 1-88-88-ANXIETY (1-888-826-9438). It is a free call. You will get free information about OCD mailed to you.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is part of the Federal government. NIMH conducts medical research to find new and better ways to prevent and treat mental illnesses. NIMH also provides free information about mental illnesses.

To get free information about other mental illnesses, write to NIMH at:
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A specific example is:
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