

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Before he can turn the engine on to drive to school every morning, Julius wipes down his steering wheel with paper towels and cleaning spray while wearing latex gloves. He feels the steering wheel is clean enough to drive only after performing 200 alternating clockwise and counterclockwise rotations. This whole ritual takes 20 minutes.

Someone with **obsessive-compulsive disorder** may have an experience like the one above.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, “OCD is characterized by repetitive, intrusive, irrational and unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and/or rituals that seem impossible to control (compulsions). Some people with OCD have specific compulsions (e.g. counting, arranging, cleaning) that they “must perform” multiple times each day in order to momentarily release their anxiety that something bad might happen to themselves or to someone they love. People with OCD may be aware that their symptoms don’t make sense and are excessive, but on another level they may fear that the thoughts they are having might be true.”¹

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, **signs and symptoms** of obsessive-compulsive disorder can include:

- Repeated thoughts or images about many different things, such as fear of germs, dirt, or intruders; being overly tidy
- Doing the same rituals over and over such as washing hands, locking and unlocking doors, counting, keeping unneeded items, or repeating the same steps again and again
- Being unable to control the unwanted thoughts and behaviors
- Not getting pleasure performing the behaviors or rituals, but getting brief relief from the anxiety the thoughts cause
- Spending at least 1 hour a day on the thoughts and rituals, which cause distress and get in the way of daily life²

Bibliography

¹ Duckworth, Ken, and Jacob Freedman. National Alliance on Mental Illness, "Anxiety Disorders." Last modified April 2012. Accessed July 25, 2013. http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=By_Illness&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=142543.

² The National Institute of Mental Health, "Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, OCD." Accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/index.shtml>.