

Treating Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)



Contributions of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (BSSR)

The Public Health Problem

2.2M OCD affects approximately 2.2 million Americans—around 1 in 100 adults and 1 in 40 children.¹

51% Approximately 51% of adults who are diagnosed with OCD experience serious impairment in areas such as work obligations, household maintenance, and social and intimate relationships.²

6 Hours per Day People with OCD report spending nearly 6 hours per day occupied by obsessions.³

The causes of OCD are diverse, and OCD diagnoses may be accompanied by a broad range of comorbidities, including the following:

- Depression
- Bipolar disorder or bipolar depression
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Panic disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Epilepsy
- Tourette syndrome
- Parkinson's disease

BSSR Health Impacts

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT is the most evidence-based psychotherapeutic treatment for OCD. It combines behavioral strategies with cognitive skills, such as mental reframing of situations, to reduce OCD symptoms.⁴ Although pharmacologic treatments are available for OCD, studies show that CBT may be more effective than treatment with medication.⁵ One form of CBT, Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), has become the gold standard for OCD treatment.



Exposure and Response Prevention

In ERP, people with OCD are gradually exposed to fear-provoking or discomforting stimuli related to their obsessions in order to help them practice resisting the urge to engage in compulsive behaviors. More than half (50% to 60%) of individuals who complete ERP treatment experience clinically significant improvement in their OCD symptoms that can be maintained in the long term; some studies have demonstrated efficacy up to 5 years post treatment.^{6, 7} Although the required length of treatment varies according to symptom severity, experts report seeing symptom improvement after 12 weeks of ERP therapy.⁸ Attesting to ERP's effectiveness, adherence to ERP therapy and between-session practice can predict treatment success.⁹



Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

ACT is a recently developed form of CBT that focuses on decreasing experiential avoidance¹⁰ and increasing psychological flexibility¹¹ among people with OCD. Preliminary evidence suggests that ACT is an effective OCD treatment with broad applicability.¹² Although in-session exposures to feared stimuli may be incorporated into ACT treatment, ACT can be administered without these exposures; with further development, therefore, it may offer another treatment option for patients who find traditional exposure therapies aversive or ineffective.¹³



References and Definitions

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- 10 Experiential avoidance is defined generally as an unwillingness to experience aversive thoughts and an attempt to avoid these types of thoughts.
–Definition adapted from the *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Sciences* [\[Back\]](#)
- 11 Psychological flexibility refers to a person’s ability to remain mentally present and composed despite unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, and to choose one’s behaviors intentionally and thoughtfully.
– Definition adapted from ScienceDirect [\[Back\]](#)
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