



BACKGROUND: Obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, is a disorder with a neurobiological basis. It affects men, women, and children equally. In the United States, about 1 in 40 adults and 1 in 100 children have OCD. According to the World Health Organization, OCD is one of the top 20 causes of illness-related disability for individuals between 15 and 44 years of age. Characteristics of OCD are obsessions and compulsions that cause significant distress. Obsessions are persistent, uncontrollable thoughts, impulses, or images that are intrusive, unwanted and disturbing. They cause anxiety or discomfort that significantly interferes with normal life. Individuals who have OCD feel compelled to perform repetitive actions called compulsions, or rituals, in an attempt to relieve the distress caused by the obsessions. Far too often, people with OCD suffer in silence. (Source: <https://beyondocd.org/ocd-facts>)

COVID AND OCD: The coronavirus crisis presents challenges for those with OCD symptoms. For example, guidance on how good hygiene can stop the spread of the virus may cause some to go to extremes. “The CDC has issued handwashing guidelines, but someone with OCD may feel an intense urge or drive to take it much further, feeling that more must be better, especially when feelings of anxiety or uncertainty take hold,” said Nathaniel Van Kirk, PhD, coordinator of Clinical Assessment for McLean’s OCD Institute. Someone living with OCD may focus solely on one part of the hygiene guidelines and ignore the rest. “Extreme anxiety can cause you to get tunnel vision where we may not be following the recommendations the way we should be because we’re so hyper-focused on a specific piece of it that you forget about the other aspects of the CDC’s guidance,” Van Kirk said. Van Kirk and his colleagues work with people in such situations to find a healthy balance between physical and mental health. (Source: <https://www.mcleanhospital.org/news/living-ocd-during-coronavirus-crisis>)

NEW TREATMENT FOR OCD: Scientists in London have discovered patients who suffer from OCD have increased levels of a protein called Immuno-moodulin (Imood) in their lymphocytes. This protein is a type of immune cell. A study in mice found high levels of this protein were found to exhibit behaviors that are characteristic of anxiety and stress, such as digging and excessive grooming. When researchers treated the mice with an antibody that neutralized Imood, the animals’ anxiety levels reduced. The findings led the researchers to file a patent application for the antibody and they are now working with a drug company to develop a potential treatment for human patients. “There is mounting evidence that the immune system plays an important role in mental disorders,” said Professor Fulvio D’Acquisto, a professor of immunology at the University of Roehampton and honorary professor of Immunopharmacology at Queen Mary University of London, who led the research. “And in fact, people with auto-immune diseases are known to have higher than average rates of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and OCD.” (Source: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200421094257.htm>)

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