



Essential Information

What is Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder?

Obsessive-Compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) is a term used to describe a pattern of personality traits that begin by early adulthood and affect most areas of a person's life. These patterns involve a rigid fixation on things being ordered and perfect without allowing any change or flexibility. Although its name is similar to obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), OCD and OCPD are different disorders.

Difficulty letting go of control

Individuals with OCPD may often become fixed on the idea of things being perfect or in order. They may like to maintain control of their thoughts and their relationships with other people. People can control their life with lists, rules, or schedules. Even if other people get annoyed at this, people with OCPD may feel the need to repetitively make sure everything is perfect or in order. This perfectionism can be a disadvantage when individuals become so involved in making every single detail perfect that a task is never accomplished. People with OCPD may also be described as rigid or stubborn, thinking there is only one 'right' way to do things. Another challenge for people with OCPD is trying to control for future events. They may experience difficulty letting go of old or worthless objects. Often they might want to keep many items 'just in case'. They also tend to control their finances tightly, becoming stingy and living below their means, in case of a possible future emergency.

Overly devoted to work and productivity

People with OCPD may spend a large amount of time at work or studying, and can often have little time for social or other enjoyable activities as a result. At work or study they aim for perfection and are very hard-working. They may not like to waste time, and feel uncomfortable taking time out to relax. People who have OCPD may often be reluctant to let anyone else help in case the other person does something that doesn't meet their high standards.

Difficulty accepting other perspectives

People who experience OCPD may have very fixed or rigid ideas about morals and values including what is ethically 'right' or 'wrong'. For instance, someone with OCPD may value punctuality and become annoyed when other people are late, judging these people harshly. People with OCPD may experience difficulties showing emotions to others or feel uncomfortable when other people express emotion. OCPD is often associated with relationship difficulties.

How common are these problems and why do they develop?

It is estimated that around 6.5% of the population experiences personality disorder problems, with a smaller number experiencing OCPD. It is more likely to be diagnosed in males. The exact cause of these problems is unknown but it is thought to arise due to a combination of factors including:

- Biological factors (such as an inherited predisposition to anxiety)
- Restrictive control by parents
- Early life experiences – sometimes behaviours are learnt (e.g., being perfectionistic, orderly, and maintaining control). Sometimes children are taught that they must always be responsible and sensible like an adult and they may act like this to avoid feeling guilty or being punished

Can it be treated?

Yes, specialist psychological treatments provided by mental health professionals have been shown to be effective for people with OCPD tendencies. Support for family and partners may also be important. For treatment and support contact your local health services.

