

Self-Help for Compulsive Behavior

Remember that thoughts lead to feelings and feelings lead to behavior. You can change your thinking or add a new thought at any time. That changes everything! Learning new ways of thinking about compulsive impulses may take time, but you're worth it!

Label It Label the obsessive thought and the compulsive behavior as *irrational*. Tell yourself that the impulse is the result of an Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and is *irrational*. Remind yourself of the reality, "I don't really *need* to count to 14" or "I don't actually *need* to wash my hands."

Slow It It may often feel like you need to quickly take care of a compulsive urge, but doing so may actually make you more tense. When you take a few breaths and slow the ritual, you will weaken its power over you. Breathe deeply and move in a slow and very deliberate manner.

Attribute It Some recent research points to OCD



being caused by a biochemical imbalance in the brain. Remind yourself that you don't *have* to follow an inaccurate message in your thinking any more than you would follow any other direction that you know to be wrong.

Team It Don't even think about dealing with compulsive behavior all by yourself. Often OCD sufferers are determined people, but having a few people on your side will clearly help. In challenging moments, connect with your best friend and go jogging, get together with a fellow support group member for lunch, or call your therapist.

Relax It It is difficult to be *uptight* about a need to perform a compulsive ritual and *relaxed* at the same time so practice lots of ways to relax. Try neck rotations, progressive relaxation, yoga, deep breathing, biofeedback, a hot bath, a massage, or even a light workout if that reduces stress for you.

Delay It First do something else! There is a law in physics that states that "no two things can occupy the same space at the same time." We can apply this idea to OCD when you engage yourself in something that completely occupies your mind or body and blocks the *space* in your thinking about the compulsion. Consider a video game, playing racquetball, or a tough algebra problem. You might also *play tricks* on your compulsion by postponing it for a few couple of minutes, then five or six minutes, and later an hour or two. You will eventually find that you don't need to give into the impulse any more. If you don't feed the compulsion, it will die.

Ignore It If you can simply ignore the impulse to do the ritual, just do it. When you ignore it enough, it will go away. If you can't ignore it yet, keep reading.

Change It You will weaken the compulsive nature of a ritual when you change any part of it. You might change the order of your ritual, do it in a different place, vary the number of repetitions, count backwards instead, change what you're thinking of, or change your position while doing it. Remind yourself of the strategies that you've designed to combat it. "I will count backwards from 23 by threes after I do ten pushups." (change & delay strategies)

Punish It Most of us dislike punishment so adding a consequence to a ritual will weaken its power over you. If you do something constructive before or after your ritual, you will enhance yourself as well as address the compulsion. Consider adding a few minutes to your workout, putting a few dollars into savings, or helping your dad by washing the car. If you add the consequences before the ritual, you'll also be delaying it (see above). You may eventually decide that giving into your irrational impulses isn't worth the trouble.

Multiply It Attacking your OCD from multiple directions is useful. It won't stand a chance!