

OCD and COVID-19: Mental Health Wellbeing Tips



For individuals with OCD, the COVID-19 outbreak can be particularly difficult. Constant messaging about hygiene and health issues can trigger OCD obsessions and compulsions about contamination, cleanliness, losing control, and harm.

The OCD voice may seem loud, but don't let it bully you.

Here are some tips for how to continue to manage your OCD during COVID-19.

Follow hygiene guidelines reasonably.

The campaign about practising good hygiene may be triggering for individuals with OCD. Posters about handwashing in the bathroom, and hand sanitising stations in shopping centres can be distressing for individuals who have urges to clean and wash excessively. Be aware of these triggers, and watch out for the OCD voice telling you to go overboard. If sticking to the recommended hygiene practices causes distress, try and distract yourself by focusing on another task at hand e.g. put on your favourite movie, or practice a relaxation exercise, knowing that the distress shall pass.

You don't need to learn everything about COVID-19.

The updates about COVID-19 are endless. Don't let the OCD voice tell you that you need to learn everything about COVID-19. You can limit your reading to official sources to stay informed (<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>). Set a time limit on news or information consumption. It might help to delete the News app on your phone, or download a website blocker extension for your Internet browser. Whenever you feel an urge to check the news, choose a hobby or activity to focus on instead e.g. start a jigsaw puzzle, read a book, or take a bath.

Reassurance seeking hurts in the long-term.

The OCD voice can tell us we need to check in with someone for reassurance again, and again, and again. Reassurance can help us feel better in the short-term, but long-term it perpetuates the symptoms of OCD. It gives the obsessions validation, reinforces the idea that you cannot cope with the uncertainty or distress associated with an obsession, and it can harm relationships with the people around us. Talk back to the OCD voice, and connect with your loved ones without reassurance seeking.

Don't let OCD rob you from your support networks.

If the OCD voice is bullying you with the worry of causing harm to others, remember you can follow guidelines for physical distancing while maintaining social connection. Reach out digitally to a friend, remind them of a good memory you share together, share something you appreciate about them, and look up online activities you can do together e.g. watch Netflix or play boardgames.

Show self-compassion.

Even people who don't usually struggle with worries about disease are experiencing anxiety right now. So don't be too hard on yourself if you are experiencing more anxiety than usual. Instead, give yourself credit for doing the best you can in a difficult time, and focus attention and energy on how you might move through the current challenge.