

RICE PAPER PRISON

BREAKING FREE FROM OCD



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COMPANION WORKBOOK

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NOTE: PRINT OUT THIS WORKBOOK

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF OCD

First, let's address the facts about Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). OCD is a common, chronic and long-lasting disorder in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts (*obsessions*) and behaviors (*compulsions*) that he or she feels the urge to repeat over and over. People with OCD may have symptoms of obsessions, compulsions, or both. These symptoms can interfere with all aspects of life, such as work, school, and personal relationships.

Obsessions are repeated thoughts, urges, or mental images that cause anxiety. Common symptoms include:

- + Fear of germs or contamination
- + Unwanted forbidden or taboo thoughts involving sex, religion, and harm, including killing
- + Aggressive thoughts towards others or self
- + Having things symmetrical or in a perfect order with fixation on numbers

Compulsions are repetitive behaviors that a person with OCD feels the urge to do in response to an obsessive thought. Common compulsions include:

- + Excessive cleaning and/or handwashing
- + Ordering and arranging things in a particular, precise way
- + Repeatedly checking on things, such as repeatedly checking to see if the door is locked or that the oven is off
- + Compulsive counting

Not all rituals or habits are compulsions.

TIP: A PERSON WITH OCD GENERALLY:

- Can't control his or her thoughts or behaviors, even when those thoughts or behaviors are recognized as excessive
- Spends at least 1 hour a day on these thoughts or behaviors
 - Doesn't get pleasure when performing the behaviors or rituals, but may feel brief relief from the anxiety the thoughts cause
- Experiences significant problems in their daily life due to these thoughts or behaviors

Sometimes OCD is accompanied by what is referred to as a tic disorder. Motor tics are sudden, brief, repetitive movements, such as eye blinking and other eye movements, facial grimacing, shoulder shrugging, and head or shoulder jerking. Common vocal tics include repetitive throat-clearing, sniffing, or grunting sounds.

PEOPLE WITH OCD MAY TRY TO HELP THEMSELVES BY AVOIDING SITUATIONS THAT TRIGGER THEIR OBSESSIONS, OR THEY MAY SELF-MEDICATE WITH ALCOHOL OR DRUGS.

Although most adults with OCD recognize that what they are doing doesn't make logical sense, there are some adults who are currently in denial that they have OCD. With regard to children, often their parents or teachers are the first to recognize the symptoms.

If you think you have OCD, talk to your doctor about your symptoms. If left untreated, OCD can negatively interfere in all aspects of life.

Further supportive information can be found on NIMH.gov web site.

TIP: WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

† Genetics

Twin and family studies have shown that people with first-degree relatives (such as a parent, sibling, or child) who have OCD are at a higher risk for developing OCD themselves. The risk is higher if the first-degree relative developed OCD as a child or teen.

† Brain Structure and Functioning

There appears to be a connection between the OCD symptoms and abnormalities in certain areas of the brain, but that connection is not clear.

† Environment

People who have experienced abuse (physical and/or sexual) in childhood or other trauma are at an increased risk for developing OCD. In some cases, children may develop OCD or OCD symptoms following a streptococcal infection.

TIP: THERAPIES

OCD is typically treated with medication and counseling. Although most patients with OCD respond to these treatments, some patients continue to experience symptoms.

TIP: Medication

Serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SRIs) and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are used to help reduce OCD symptoms. Examples of medications that have been proven effective in both

OCD include clomipramine, which is a member of an older class of “tricyclic” antidepressants, and several newer SSRIs, including:

fluoxetine
fluvoxamine
sertraline

TIP: If you are prescribed a medication, be sure you:

- Talk with your doctor or a pharmacist to make sure you understand the risks and benefits of the medications you're taking.
- Do not stop taking a medication without talking to your doctor first. Suddenly stopping a medication may lead to "rebound" or worsening of OCD symptoms. Other uncomfortable or potentially dangerous withdrawal effects are also possible.
- Report any concerns about side effects to your doctor right away. You may need a change in the dose or a different medication.
- Report serious side effects to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration MedWatch Adverse Event Reporting program by phone at 1-800-332-1088.

TIP: Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is talk therapy and can be an effective treatment for adults and children with OCD. Research shows that certain types of psychotherapy, enhanced with cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) and other related therapies, like habit reversal training (HRT) can be as effective as medication for many individuals.

Research also shows that a type of CBT called exposure and response prevention (ERP) is effective in reducing compulsive behaviors in OCD, even in people who did not respond well to medication initially. Additionally, there have been some reports of positive responses to Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR) used as an adjunct treatment to CBT.

TIP: Finding



Treatment

For general information on mental health and to locate treatment services in your area, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Referral Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

To find a local counselor, www.PsychologyToday.com is a good place to start. There are many counselors/therapists who specialize in the treatment of OCD.

Tolerating Uncertainty

Learning to tolerating uncertainty is the goal with OCD. Below are some suggestions on how to get started on the path to tolerance.

TIP: How to Tolerate Uncertainty

Dealing with uncertainty is an unavoidable part of daily life. Because we can't see the future, we can never be certain about what exactly is going to happen day to day. Research has found that people vary in their ability to tolerate uncertainty. That is, some people are okay with having a lot of uncertainty in their lives, and other people cannot stand even a small amount of uncertainty.

Anxious people, particularly those adults who worry excessively, are more likely to be very **intolerant of uncertainty**. They will often try to plan and prepare for everything as a way of avoiding or eliminating uncertainty.

What's Wrong with Being Intolerant of Uncertainty?

Obviously, it is normal, even common, for most people to be a bit uncomfortable with uncertainty. We prefer to know that the restaurant we are going to serves food that we like, that there will be people we know at the party we were invited to, and that our boss tells us exactly what he thinks about our work performance. This knowledge feels more comfortable to us than not knowing anything about the restaurant we are going to, being unsure about who will be at the party, and not knowing whether our boss thinks we are doing a good or a bad job.

† Uncertainty as an allergy:

Being intolerant of uncertainty is a lot like having an allergy. If you are allergic to pollen, for example, you will sneeze and cough and your eyes may get red and teary when you are exposed to even a small amount of pollen. When people who are intolerant of uncertainty are exposed to a little bit of uncertainty, they also have a strong reaction: they worry, and do everything they can think of to get away from, avoid or eliminate the uncertainty.

However, being very intolerant of uncertainty can cause problems, since it leads to a lot of time-consuming and tiring behaviors, causes stress and anxiety, and is the major fuel for worry.

How do I do this?

If you can't stand having uncertainty in your life, you are probably doing things that are designed to either remove all uncertainty in daily life situations or you are outright avoiding uncertain situations.

TIP: Some of the behaviors that people do when they are intolerant of uncertainty include:

- Seeking excessive reassurance from others: This might be asking friends or family their opinion on a decision that you have to make.
- List-making: As a way of eliminating uncertainty, some people will make long and detailed “to do” lists, sometimes several lists every day.

- Double checking: For example, calling loved ones repeatedly to “make sure” that they are okay, or re-reading emails several times to check that they are perfect and that there are no spelling mistakes.
- Refusing to delegate tasks to others: Many people who are intolerant of uncertainty will not allow anyone either at work or at home to do certain tasks; this is because they cannot be “sure” that it will be done correctly unless they do it.
- Procrastination/avoidance: Because being uncertain can cause anxiety, some people simply procrastinate or avoid people, places or situations. If you do not do something, then you don’t have to feel uncertain about it.
- Distraction: Many people who are intolerant of uncertainty keep themselves “busy” most of the day, that way, they don’t have the time to think about all the uncertainty in life.

You probably noticed that all of the aforementioned behaviors require a lot of time and energy. Needing to be certain about everything can often take the fun out of life, since surprises or unexpected events become something threatening. Also, if you avoid or procrastinate, you might miss out on a lot of good opportunities in life simply because of a dislike of uncertainty.

TIP: Unless you can see the future, you will always be uncertain about some things.

Another problem with intolerance of uncertainty

If you can’t stand uncertainty and do everything you can to get rid of it, you might have noticed a problem: it is **IMPOSSIBLE** to get rid of all uncertainty in your life.

What this means for you is that all the work that you are doing to get rid of uncertainty is useless, *it just doesn't work*. If it did, you would probably not be struggling with anxiety and worry.

So, what is the solution?

If you can't get rid of uncertainty in your life, the only way to manage your intolerance of uncertainty is by **learning to be more TOLERANT of uncertainty**.

How can I learn to become more tolerant?

Obviously, even if you agree that being more tolerant of uncertainty would be helpful, it is not easy to change an attitude. However, in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), we know that our thoughts, feelings and actions are all inter-connected, and that if you change one, you can change the others.

Now, you may be sidetracked by the thought, "I have so many compulsions; how do I know which one to work on." This is often the situation with OCD. For example, many people with contamination fears have checking compulsions as well. The best way to determine which behavior to work on is to ask yourself this simple question:

"Which compulsion, if I could be free of it, would make the most difference in the quality of my life?"

If you want to have the opposite response to an obsession, you must act in the opposite way toward the obsession.

That sounds reasonable, but where does one start? Since avoidance is a hallmark of compulsions, summon it toward you when you are feeling the best. In other words, lean into that which you avoid.

If you avoid touching a potentially dirty doorknob, go toward it and touch it and then don't wash your hands.

Do this several times per day.

The goal is to train your body to react differently. You are taking your control back and no longer allowing your brain to play tricks on you anymore. By engaging in this task, repeatedly, you are sending a clear signal to your brain. Not only are you going toward what you used to actively avoid, you are demonstrating that you can take back control because what you can beckon you can also ignore. What begins to happen is your brain begins to understand that you are now in control of the compulsion.

Please be patient with this process as it will take diligent effort over a period of

several weeks or months. It took a long time for you to get wound up in your current behavioral responses, it will take some time to unwind from it as well. *If you require a more structured approach, perhaps Step 1 – Step 6 is more your speed. This alternative structured approach is listed below.*

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TIP: LEARN TO ACT "AS IF"

The efficient method to increase tolerance is to start acting “as if” you are already tolerant of uncertainty. That is, you can **change your behavior around uncertainty**, and this will eventually help you **to change your thoughts and feelings around uncertainty**.

Step 1: Make a list of behaviors

Start by listing all of the behaviors on page 11. These would be those things that you do in order to try and feel more certain, or to get around or avoid uncertainty. A good way to compose this list is to be a detective in your daily life: notice when you are feeling anxious, and what it is that you do to try to feel less anxious. For example, if you have to buy a present for someone and you start to feel anxious about what to buy, what do you do? Do you call your friends and ask for advice about what to get?

For example:

Do you seek reassurance from others?

Do you do a lot of double-checking?

Do you look for a great deal of information before making a decision?

Do you procrastinate a lot?

Are there situations that you avoid?

Behavior	Anxiety Level

Behavior	Anxiety Level

Step 2: Start small

If you want to start acting “as if” you are tolerant of uncertainty, it is best to start small (least anxiety) listed on page 11. With this in mind, look at the behaviors that you have that might be easier to try to

change. You can then rank your anxiety on a scale from 0 (“no anxiety at all”) to 10 (“extreme anxiety”) by imagining how anxious you would become if you **could not** do them.

Step 3: Practice tolerating uncertainty

Once you have a list of behaviors that you do to reduce or avoid uncertainty, then start picking small items that you can do to practice tolerating uncertainty. Try to do at least 3 things a week. Repeat the exposure task over and over until your anxiety rating goes down by 20%. For example, you might try going to a restaurant and ordering a meal that you have never had, and then you might send a few emails without checking them first (and no cheating! Don’t send the email to yourself as well so that you can check it later).

Step 4: Record your journey!

This workbook has space to record your journey, beginning on page 17. When you record your journey, you will be able to see all the work that you did in facing uncertainty. As you keep practicing, you will find that the things you once thought were difficult have become much easier. For you to look back on your progress is an important way for you to see how far you have come on this challenging journey.

If you are taking some risks and are not being 100% certain in your life, there is the chance that

things will not go perfectly. For example, if you tolerate uncertainty and go to a movie without reading a review, you might not like the movie. If you go grocery shopping without a list, you might come home and realize that you forgot something.

As you record your journey, consider the following bullet points:

- What you did
- How you felt while doing it (was it harder or easier than you thought?)
- What happened (did everything turn out alright?)
- If it did not turn out as planned, what did you do instead?

TIP: When you allow some uncertainty in your life, sometimes things go wrong but that doesn't mean you cannot tolerate the uncertainty.

It is important to write the outcome of your tolerating uncertainty exercises, and what you did to cope. For example, if you forgot an item from the grocery store, what did you do? Did you choose it up the next day? Did you go back to the store? How horrible was the outcome? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Did things turn out O.K., even though I was not 100% certain?
- If things did not turn out O.K., what happened?
- What did I do to cope with the negative outcome?

- Was I able to handle the negative outcome?
- What does this tell me about my ability to cope with negative outcomes in the future?

Step 5: Allow for life to happen

REMEMBER: *Sometimes things will not go exactly as planned, if you allow some uncertainty into your life. But this is not a sign of failure on your part. Most people who tolerate uncertainty learn that even if bad things happen, they can cope with them.*

It is also important to realize that despite trying to make everything certain, things often didn't always work out. It just took a lot more energy and time trying to be certain. By becoming more tolerant of uncertainty, you can let go of all of the problems associated with being intolerant, and you get to realize that you can deal with things, even when they don't go perfectly.

Step 6: Build momentum!

When you feel comfortable with the small steps that you have taken to tolerate uncertainty, gradually try more difficult things (things that cause you increased anxiety).

Look for opportunities to tolerate uncertainty in daily life. For example, if someone asks you to pick up a bottle of

wine for a party, try going to the store and buying a bottle without asking for anyone's advice.

As you start acting more and more “as if” you are comfortable with uncertainty, it will get easier and become a part of your life. Think of it like building a muscle; you need to do your exercises every day if you want that muscle to get strong!

Record your journey here:
