



Times Are Strange, But Uncertainty Is Nothing New: Managing COVID-19 When You or a Loved One Has OCD

Tips for Coping with OCD

Use friends and family and ONE authoritative source (like the Centers for Disease Control, not a website that promotes an entire decontamination ritual for groceries) to help you identify what you do have control over and action steps you can take that will be useful. Recognize that doing these things will not alleviate your anxiety - because your brain feels anxious at baseline. That is just your brain. Work on accepting and living with the feelings, rather than trying to make them go away by worrying, figuring out, fixing or avoiding.

Go toward your anxiety, embrace it, and even try to make it worse. Find things that challenge your anxiety each day. The more you CHOOSE to be anxious, the less power it has over you, and you gain a sense of mastery over an otherwise potentially overwhelming and terrifying experience.

Just because you probably shouldn't lick dumpsters right now or eat off of toilet seats in public restrooms doesn't mean you can't do exposures. You can find ways to make yourself anxious and challenge your fears, even if your fears are contamination-based – touch the insides of your own trash cans, wear the same clothes three days in a row, put raw meat juice on your pants, put bathroom germs on your remote control, or touch your mail without gloves.

OCD lives in the past and future. Practice mindfulness, and focus on what you are doing in the moment.

Allow for imperfection - you will have bad days, and that's okay. Just start over the next day. All you can do is your best, and no one will cope perfectly. Be kind to yourself, and practice self-compassion.

Find ways to help people and take the focus off yourself. Offer to buy groceries for an elderly neighbor. Reach out to people who may be more anxious than you. Sign up with local volunteer efforts. Tip the delivery person a little extra.

Each day, write down at least one thing you are grateful for.

Exercise, even if just by going for a brief walk around your neighborhood. Be sure to get outside each day.

Keep a schedule. Get dressed and shower like you normally would, even if you aren't going anywhere.

Continue to go to therapy, and take medications as prescribed. Most therapists have switched to offering virtual sessions.

Journal. It will help you process, and it will be interesting to revisit when we recover from this. It is also a good way to allow yourself to process and experience the negative emotions you are feeling, rather than avoiding or trying to escape these emotions.

Look for online support groups.

Move to new setting/environment if getting stuck with school or work.

Find some consistency, e.g. a Netflix series you have enjoyed in the past, a comforting night-time routine, walking the dog, or touching base with family or friends each day.

