Discussion

Although there are many other things to worry about and deal with on top of your Obsessive Compulsive Disorder when college starts, there is nothing to fear. All you have to do in order to manage your OCD is go back to the basics and think about three major categories: Stress Management, Health and Decisions, and Support.

Stress Management

Managing stress is one of the biggest triggers of OCD symptoms. In college you are bound to run into many stressful academic factors such as tests, homework assignments and group projects, but there are some simple ways to combat these stressors before they even begin.

Making Schedules

Constructing a daily, weekly, or even quarterly schedule will help you stay on track of your studies and due dates. Making a schedule, however, only works if you have the dedication and devotion to stick to them, so keep that in mind when formulating daily to-do lists. Do not overload your days. Account for study breaks, lunch, dinner, exercise and being social with family and friends.

Sleep and Exercise

It is recommended that students get at least 8 hours of sleep per night to be well rested and mentally prepared for the next day. Exercising regularly is also a huge stress reducer because of the chemicals released into your brain after a workout which gives you an energy boost, or a “runner’s high,” a term with which you are probably familiar. Getting a 30 minute cardio workout daily is recommended to not only keep you in shape but also to release tension and stress from the body.

Learning Style

While in college it is imperative to recognize your learning style. For example, are you an auditory, visual or kinesthetic learner? Knowing this one piece of information can make everything click and come together because you will be able to format your notes and study material so you can study in a way that custom fits you. In order to maintain a strong grasp on all of your studies, it is important to take a course load that fits your personal abilities. If that means taking a lighter course load, then cater to that need. It’s far more beneficial to take it slow and get better grades than taking a large course load and just barely cutting it.

Health and Decisions

Being a college student with OCD means that you have more responsibilities than others who do not have OCD regarding decisions that may affect your health.

Alcohol and Drugs

If you are taking medication to manage your OCD it is essential to know that the prescriptions you are taking probably don’t mix very well with alcohol or other drugs. If these medications are
impaired they will not function as effectively and may make college life and its stressors significantly more difficult to cope with. Alcohol impairs sleep which may affect your ability to deal with stress.

**Being Proactive**

If you think that your medication is not working properly or as effectively as you would like it to, or if you feel uncomfortable with a treatment, don’t just stop taking it. Consult with your doctor about all of your concerns. There are other medications that may work better for you, or perhaps it is just the dosage that needs to be adjusted.

**Be Informed**

If you are unsure about how to manage your OCD, learn as much as you can. Do not rely on others to give you information unless you know it is a reliable source. Not taking any medication may be more harmful than taking an incorrect dosage, for example.

**Support**

It is very important to have a support network. This can be comprised of friends and family, but there are also other services around your community and on your college campus that are available to you.

**Family and Friends**

Don’t let college and studying consume your life. Stay in touch with family and loved ones because social isolation can aggravate your OCD. Having these important people in your life can keep you motivated and help avoid setbacks.

**Campus Services**

Cal Poly’s Disability Resource Center offers many services such as the Adaptive Technology Center, Alternative Media, Disability Management, Note-Taking, Test Accommodations and many more. There are eligibility requirements that need to be met before one can utilize these resources, so you should be prepared to have a written diagnosis from your doctor or therapist.

**Support Groups**

There many types of support groups you can be involved in such as online communities like Facebook and through blogs or other chats. Therapy support groups that meet in person and discuss experiences in an environment where you learn from each other are also great options for building motivation.

**Local Services**

There are also many local resources that are available for you to utilize, such as local private clinics.

**Related Conditions**

These disorders often occur in combination with OCD:

- Major Depression. Persistent sad, empty, or hopeless mood, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, insomnia or oversleeping, weight gain or loss, thoughts of death or suicide.

• Anxiety Disorders. Generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, social anxiety disorder, and phobias.

Resource: Anxiety Disorders Association of America <http://www.adaa.org>

• Eating Disorders. Anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating. About 40% of people with anorexia also have OCD.


• Tourette Syndrome or Tic Disorders. Involuntary movements, facial expressions, and/or vocalizations, including blinking, shrugging, sniffing, humming, or involuntary speech.

Resource: Tourette Syndrome Association of America <http://tsa-usa.org>

• Body Dysmorphic Disorder. Preoccupation with an imagined or exaggerated defect in one’s personal appearance. A person with BDD is overwhelmed by negative thoughts about the way they look even though others believe they look fine.

Resource: Mayo Clinic <http://www.mayoclinic.com>

• Trichotillomania and Skin Picking. Compulsive hair-pulling (“Trich”) and skin-picking are considered body-focused repetitive behaviors.

Resource: Trichotillomania Learning Center <http://www.trich.org>

• Attention Deficit Disorder. ADD and AD/HD (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder) can occur in children and adults. Symptoms include inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

Resource: Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder <http://www.CHADD.org>

**Do’s and Don’ts**

Do visit your school’s counseling center right away and tell a health professional you think you have OCD. Ask whether cognitive behavior therapy is available at your school or in the community.

Do learn as much as you can about your disorder so you can get better, succeed in school, and enjoy college social life.

Do keep track of your symptoms: the time, place, and intensity of your obsessive thoughts and the nature and duration of your compulsions, including avoidance, procrastination, and reassurance, seeking, and perfectionism. Make a detailed inventory of your symptoms, and consider which ones you most want to change.

Don’t be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help. OCD is a medical condition — you deserve to feel better, and effective treatment is available. You won’t get better by hiding your symptoms and suffering in silence.
Don’t settle for talk therapy, which is not effective in treating OCD, or for medication alone, which does not teach you how to manage your anxiety. Remember that cognitive behavior therapy is the treatment of choice.

Don’t use alcohol or other substances as a way to deal with your OCD. Your symptoms will still be there (and may get worse), and you run the risk of acquiring an addiction or creating a crisis situation. If you believe you have developed a substance abuse problem, make an appointment at the counseling center or student health services to learn about treatment options, and be sure to tell the counselors there about your OCD.

Do take care of yourself. Eat well and get enough sleep and exercise. Learn to manage stress in healthy ways. Learn everything you can about OCD (start with the OCD Chicago website at http://www.ocdchicago.org) so you understand what’s happening to you, and check out Go Anxiety.org (http://www.gotanxiety.org) for helpful information about dealing with stress, as well as tips on study habits and handling things like homesickness.

Bibliography


