Relationships

Obsessions, Compulsions and Caregiving

Most people have heard of Howard Hughes, a wealthy businessman and aviator in the 1940’s. Hughes was famous for his many accomplishments, but also because he suffered from a condition that was not then well understood: obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). In Hughes’ case, his OCD took over his day-to-day life. Among his symptoms were a phobia about germs, isolating himself from others, and bizarre eating habits.

Today we know more about the causes and treatment of OCD, but there is still much to learn. People with OCD have persistent, upsetting thoughts (obsessions) and use rituals (compulsions) to try to control the anxiety that these thoughts produce. OCD behaviors are not the same as habits. You may be in the habit of washing your hands several times a day to reduce your chances of catching the flu, for example. A person with OCD hand-washing, however, does it so often that it interferes with his life and he finds it distressing. He may wash his hands dozens of times a day to the point that his skin is damaged. He recognizes that repetitive hand-washing doesn’t really make sense but he can’t stop himself.

OCD affects men and women...
equally and seems to run in families in some cases. Symptoms may come and go over time, get worse, or get better, even without treatment.

OCD behaviors typically begin during childhood, adolescence or early adulthood, but they can begin during senior years as well. Only a few studies have examined OCD onset among seniors. Among seniors, onset of OCD may be associated with an illness or dementia. A complete neurological and physical exam by a doctor could help diagnose the causes.

Here are some behaviors of seniors that may be symptomatic of OCD:
- Hoarding food, newspapers, clothing or pets.
- Repeatedly cleaning sinks, toilets or dishes because of a fear of germs.
- Counting or touching things, often in a particular sequence.
- Repeatedly locking and relocking all the doors and windows before going to bed.

What can caregivers do to help a senior with OCD? Severe OCD is usually treated by doctors with a combination of talk therapy and medication. For less severe cases, caregivers may be able to help reduce or manage the troubling behaviors. Recognize that OCD behaviors are often related to stress and anxiety in the senior. Try to identify stressful situations that seem to trigger OCD behaviors and limit those situations. Consider other strategies for reducing stress: meditation, soothing music, or perhaps changes in diet such as caffeine.

Help your senior retain a sense of control by remaining calm when OCD behavior begins. Don’t belittle the behavior or try to force the senior to stop immediately. Recognize that many OCD behaviors focus on one’s surroundings (furniture, dishes, towels, decorations, etc.) being organized in an exact way. Moving a senior to new surroundings may be very stressful for her. Some caregivers try to help hoarders, for example, by cleaning out all the accumulated stuff. Without treating the OCD itself, of course, the hoarder will likely begin the cycle all over again.

While the focus of this article has been on seniors with OCD, sometimes it is the caregiver herself who is suffering from OCD. All the same treatment options apply to caregivers as well as seniors.
Housing
How to Keep Your Home Safe for Grandchildren

When your children left home, you removed the cabinet locks, stopped putting away household cleaning products and started storing your medicines on the counter. Now you have grandchildren coming over to visit. It’s time to take do a safety check of your home to make sure it has been “childproofed.”

Start by putting away medications and vitamins. Every minute of every day, a poison control center answers a call about a young child getting into medicine. In 38% of the cases, the medicine belonged to grandparents who often store medicines on the nightstand, or near the bathroom or kitchen sink. Medications and vitamins should be stored in a locked cabinet.

Below are some additional steps you can take to keep children safe when they come to visit. These steps will also help keep you safe.

- Place Poison Control stickers on poisonous products and teach children that they need to stay away from anything with a Poison Control sticker on it.
- Store knives and sharp objects out of reach of children.
- Block unused outlets with furniture.
- Add bumpers or soft covers over sharp edges of furniture.
- Don’t leave any appliance cords dangling from countertops and tables.
- Store pesticides, paints and varnishes in a locked cabinet in the garage or a storage shed.
- Keep the number for the Georgia Poison Control Center Hotline near the phones and on the refrigerator. (1-800-222-1222)

*In case of emergency please call 911.

Childproofing a home doesn’t mean you can remove all risks of injury. You should always remember to keep a watchful eye on children. They are clever.
Nutrition
10 Ways to “Spring” into Good Health

Many of us see the spring season as a time to improve our health. Choose one of these suggestions to get started:

- **Add 15 more minutes of physical activity to your day.** This will get you started if you have not been exercising regularly. It will also add more healthy movement if you are already active. The more you move, the healthier you will stay.

- **Drink one more glass of water a day.** Most of us don’t drink enough water, but most people can add one more serving. If you do not like water, add some slices of cucumber, strawberries, lemon, orange or lime.

- **Add a serving of vegetables.** The majority of us do not get the 2 ½ cups a day recommended by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. Try a small salad, a cup of vegetable soup, a ½ cup of cooked vegetable or some vegetable juice.

- **Eat one more serving of fruit.** Again, most of us do not get the 2 cups recommended per day. Try fruit for dessert, a fruit smoothie for a snack, or some cooked fruit to top your pancakes or waffles.

- **Add a serving of dairy food.** We need more calcium and protein as we get older. Good choices are plain or vanilla yogurt layered with cereal and fruit, part skim ricotta cheese on a bagel, hot cereal made with half water and half milk, shredded cheese on salads and soups and hot chocolate.

- **Eat one more serving of whole grains each day.** Whole grains may reduce risk for heart disease and diabetes. So many different kinds are now available including whole wheat bread, whole grain dry cereals, oatmeal, instant brown rice, popcorn, barley, quinoa, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat cous cous and bulgur. Many grains can be cooked ahead and frozen in individual portions. Once you get used to the taste and texture of whole grains, refined grains and white bread will seem boring.
...Continued from Page 4

- **Switch from butter and shortening to olive oil or canola oil.** These oils are lower in saturated and trans fat and contain no cholesterol. Cut the amount of fat in a recipe by ¼ when you substitute an oil for a solid fat.

- **Cut the salt you add to food and recipes by ¼ to ½.** You can get used to less salt. There is no need to add salt to the cooking water of pasta. Biscuits and muffins can be made with less or no salt. Use herbs and spices to replace all or part of the salt in side dish and entrée recipes. Take the salt shaker off the table.

- **Eat out one less time per week.** You will cut down on a lot of fat, sodium, sugar and calories and save some money.

- **Watch one less TV show per week.** Use that time to take a walk, go to the gym or just talk to your family and friends.

*Please see Page 6 for a great Spring recipe!*

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**UGA Family and Consumer Sciences Extension**

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Spring Sun Chicken Stir-Fry
Here is a quick and easy way to add some vegetables and whole grains to your meal.

1 whole chicken breast, skinned, boned and cut into strips
1 tablespoon reduced sodium soy sauce
1 tablespoon sherry or reduced or low sodium chicken broth
2 teaspoons cornstarch
Dash of black or red pepper
2 tablespoons canola oil
1 large bag of frozen Chinese-style mixed vegetables
½ teaspoon ground ginger or ½ tablespoon fresh ginger, minced
¼ cup reduced or low sodium chicken broth
4 cups cooked brown rice

1. Combine the chicken with the soy sauce, cornstarch, pepper and sherry or broth. Marinate for ½ hour.
2. Heat oil in wok or large non-stick skillet. Stir-fry chicken.
3. After chicken is browned, add the frozen vegetables and ginger. Stir fry for 5 minutes.
4. Add broth and cover. Heat 2-3 minutes more or until hot.
5. Serve on brown rice.

Makes 4 servings

Nutrition Analysis with reduced sodium broth and 1 cup brown rice:
Calories: 442
Carbohydrate: 54 g
Protein: 21 g
Fat: 15 g
Saturated Fat: 2 g
Cholesterol: 39 mg
Sodium: 347 mg
Fiber: 6 g

With low sodium chicken broth:
Sodium is 317 mg per serving.