

Planning to prevent a setback

First, think what events, situations or circumstances might prompt a setback – anything you know is coming up that you might find particularly stressful, or which is liable to increase uncertainty, reduce your sense of control, or increase your sense of responsibility. Examples could be illness, family changes, increased work pressure, moving house, exams. Make a note of these:

Now, think how you could plan to tackle these events or situations to minimise their impact. Write down your thoughts now, while you are feeling calm. These might include the kind of practical support you could seek, or anticipating the sorts of thoughts and feelings you might experience so that you can more readily accept and normalise them.

What could you do to practise coping with them? Write down any suggestions that come to mind. For example, it might make sense for you deliberately to seek out triggers for intrusive thoughts, like watching certain kinds of movies and doing nothing in response to your anxiety.

To reduce the chances of a setback becoming more serious, it is helpful to take action to tackle it as early as you can. What might be early warning signs that your OCD is beginning to creep back in? List here those to watch out for:

Moving forward, not sliding back

One of the biggest mistakes we see people make is the decision to settle for ‘manageable OCD’. In our view, this is a bit like aiming to stay ‘a bit pregnant’ – sooner or later things are going to develop further. Such a decision leaves you

vulnerable to relapse. So, in the same way that a person who has a bad back needs to strengthen their back and tummy muscles, people who are recovering from OCD need to strengthen their psychological capabilities, such as

- living with uncertainty
- avoiding excessive responsibility
- avoiding catastrophising
- risk-taking
- flexible thinking
- tolerance of emotional discomfort
- willingness to experience intrusive thoughts, images and sensations.

The key thing is to *remain aware of your vulnerability*.

A few people may ultimately need to accept a reduced, ‘manageable’ level of OCD in the long term, but this will only work if they continue to work at keeping it down to the very minimum and staying psychologically healthy.

Keep asking yourself: in order for you to maintain your gains, what are the main things you need to work at? List them here:

Key questions to help you prevent a relapse

One of the most helpful things to do to prevent yourself returning to your former level of OCD is to be clear about what has helped you to get better. These questions are designed to help you reflect on this:

- What are the most useful things you've learned that have helped you overcome your OCD?
- What are the most helpful techniques you've applied in overcoming your OCD?

Make a written summary in the box provided. If your OCD returns, it will be there to help you immediately nip any relapse in the bud.

Most useful things I have learned in overcoming my OCD

**Most helpful tasks I have used in overcoming
my OCD**
