

Finding The Right Treatment for OCD in Canada

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is one of the most misunderstood and stigmatized mental health conditions.

People with OCD experience obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are unwanted thoughts or images that can cause you to feel distressed or anxious. If you don't do anything about these thoughts, you will likely feel like something terrible will happen — you'll crash a car, burn down your house, or harm others.

To relieve these feelings and prevent bad things from happening, those of us with OCD perform compulsive actions or get stuck inside a mental loop.

If you think you have OCD or have been diagnosed, the challenge is finding the best treatments and therapists.

How can therapy help with OCD?

Treating OCD isn't quick or easy. It can take a lot of work.

Many health coaches or alternative healthcare practitioners might offer a quick and guaranteed fix to treat your symptoms—but these approaches deplete your wallet, provide false hope, and are ultimately not backed by science-based medicine.

To treat OCD, look for practitioners who offer Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) therapy, the first-line treatment for the condition. ERP is a type of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) that's effective for treating OCD alone or in combination with medications. ERP can help break the cycle of obsessions and compulsions.

However, not all therapists that offer CBT have experience with ERP, so it is important to find a therapist with training and experience in treating OCD.

Other evidence-backed modalities for treating OCD are **Inference-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (I-CBT)** and **mindfulness-based cognitive therapy**; additionally, **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** is often used to target symptoms.

How Exposure and Response Prevention works

First, you'll meet with a mental health professional who will learn about your obsessions and compulsions. The goal is to understand what kinds of thoughts and situations make you anxious and why you feel it is important for you to perform compulsions.

During the ERP sessions, you'll work with a trained professional to desensitize your brain to these thoughts. You'll be gradually exposed to situations that trigger obsessions and let them simmer.

Example: If your obsessions revolve around fears of contamination, ERP could start by having you touch a table in a coffee shop. Then, with the same hand, they might ask you to touch your face, phone, or other objects in your home.

By allowing germs to linger, you directly confront the fear of contamination. Your brain also learns that nothing disastrous will happen when you resist acting out your compulsion to clean or sanitize your hands or home.

When will I start to feel better?

Eventually, ERP makes it easier to prevent yourself from acting out compulsions. Through a process called habituation, your brain will stop associating your triggers and obsessions with anxiety and other negative emotions.

It might take 12 to 16 weekly sessions to start noticing these improvements, though some people may respond faster than others. Some people might need daily medications alongside therapy to see this effect. Medication is often recommended when therapy feels challenging to complete or when progress takes longer than expected. Your family physician can discuss medication options with you or refer you to a psychiatrist who can help.

Other therapies for OCD

Inference-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (I-CBT) helps treat some of the intrusive and obsessive thoughts that come with OCD.

I-CBT is based off the idea that some people with OCD experience distress from their thoughts because they imagine hypothetical premises where things will go wrong. Rather than trusting your own senses that you might be safe, the brain infers danger based on these hypothetical scenarios.

During an I-CBT session, a therapist will walk you through some of the ways your obsessive thoughts and concerns don't align with your reality. The ultimate goal of I-CBT is to regain trust over your senses so that your obsessive thoughts no longer cause distress.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is another form of treatment used alongside ERP. ACT focuses on helping you stay present and mindful, encouraging awareness of your thoughts and experiences. Incorporating ACT ensures that the goals of ERP are aligned with your unique personal values and needs, enhancing the overall effectiveness of your treatment.

How can I find a mental health professional that treats OCD?

Finding the right mental health professional to treat your OCD can be confusing. There are many different types of mental health care professionals who might be able to help, each offering different benefits.

Psychotherapists

Psychotherapists (RP or RP(Q)) are Master's trained professionals that provide different kinds of therapy but cannot diagnose mental health conditions or prescribe medications.

In the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, only individuals who meet specific training requirements can call themselves psychotherapists. In Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island (PEI), and New Brunswick, professionals with similar training are referred to as Counselling Therapists. In British Columbia, the professional designation "Registered Clinical Counsellor" is granted to individuals with comparable training.

At the time of this resource's publication (2025), Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba offer no provincially regulated title specifically for psychotherapists or counsellors, but professionals in mental health care fields are often licensed through national organizations or local associations. In Newfoundland and Labrador, regulated counsellors are typically referred to as Registered Counselling Therapists.

To determine someone's level of training, ensure that they have graduated from a master's-level program and are registered with a governing body, such as the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO) or the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC).

Psychotherapists typically charge between \$150-\$200 per 50-minute session.

Social workers

Some social workers (RSW or MSW) also provide therapy services. Like psychotherapists, their profession is regulated across different provinces. However, social workers cannot diagnose a mental health condition or prescribe medications.

Social workers typically charge between \$100-\$200 per 50-minute session.

Psychologists

Psychologists (PsyD or PhD) are mental health professionals who receive six to ten years of training to obtain a Master's or Doctoral degree. They are regulated by a specific psychological body within the province where they practice. A licensed psychologist may be able to provide a mental health diagnosis but cannot prescribe medication.

Due to their academic and clinical training, psychologists typically charge between \$200-280 per 50-minute session.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists (MD) are medical doctors trained to treat mental health conditions. They undergo medical school training to diagnose different conditions and prescribe medications.

Visits to a psychiatrist are free in Canada, but there are long waitlists nationwide. Typically, family physicians provide referrals for psychiatrists, and they cannot be self-referred.

Where can I find mental health professionals who are accepting new patients?

To find mental health professionals accepting new patients, you can try searching through these databases:

- [Affordable Therapy Network](#)
- [Canadian Association for Cognitive Behavioural Therapies \(CACBT\)](#)
- [International OCD Foundation Resource Directory](#)

You can also ask your family doctor, trusted friends, and family members for suggestions. When you book a consultation or first appointment, ask to ensure that the professionals you choose are trained to provide ERP

and they have experience working with other clients with OCD. You can also use your introductory session with a new mental health professional to ask about their approach and how they incorporate ERP into treatment.

[Resolve Mental Health](#) is also an OCD-focused, ERP-centered clinic, offering low-cost, high-quality psychotherapy, with sessions ranging from \$30-\$130.

Finding the right help for you

While there is no ‘quick fix’ for obsessive-compulsive disorder, if you are struggling with OCD, a licensed mental health professional can help.

A combination of ERP, ACT, and I-CBT therapy, combined with medication, is considered the most effective way to treat the symptoms of OCD. ERP gradually exposes you to situations that provoke your obsessions, helping you feel less anxious and stressed over time and making it easier to resist acting on compulsions.

Therapy is a highly **individualized process** — finding the right mental health professional who **makes you feel safe** and **supports you** in easing your symptoms can be the first step toward lasting relief and healing.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to [Simon Spichak](#) and [Noah Tile](#) for preparing this Anxiety Canada resource.

More OCD Resources

Learn more about OCD, anxiety, and evidence-based coping tools at anxietycanada.com. For those supporting a loved one with OCD, see our free directory of [OCD Support Groups Across Canada](#).