



The Face of OCD

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Is More Than Strange Habits, It's Life-Consuming

April 10, 2006 — - Obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, has hijacked Liz McIngvale's life and causes her to perform all sorts of bizarre behavior.

"There was a point in time I woke up every day asking my mom to kill me. People don't realize how much agony, how much grief and how real it really is to us," McIngvale said.

She is the national spokeswoman for the Obsessive Compulsive Foundation's new awareness campaign, "What Does OCD Look Like?"

"I have to get up and I have to do all the rituals so I just dread everything about it," she said about the disorder.

McIngvale invited "Good Morning America" into her home to see what it was really like to live with OCD. Because her major fear is contamination, she performs rituals to try to make those thoughts go away.

"This is kind of my whole hand-washing ritual, so if you see me washing my hands I do the exact same thing every time. I kind of clean under my nails and every part of my hands for like 20 seconds," she said while going through her routine.

McIngvale performs this ritual hundreds of times a day and not because she wants to.

"These people are not psychotic. They are not crazy. They know what they're doing," said **Dr. Michael Jenike** of the Harvard Medical School Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation. "They obviously physically can stop, but inside they'll get terrible anxiety. They'll feel like they're going to die. Someone's going to get sick."

A Mysterious Condition

It's a mental illness that still puzzles psychiatrists like Jenike.

"Nobody knows for sure what causes OCD, but in most cases it looks like it's actually a neurological disorder," he said.

"The reason I put soap in my hair. ... It's like as I sleep, like if I feel like my bra somehow touched the pillow or anything like that or my skin wasn't washed properly, I feel like my hair gets contaminated," McIngvale said.

She doesn't choose her obsessions. They seem to choose her.

"I have to do it again, all over, because I feel like my hair touched the side of my arm, which my arms are all contaminated," she said. "And since I think all my faucets are contaminated, I have to turn them off with my feet so it's easy for me but that's kind of how it goes."

Next, McIngvale needed to wash the doorknobs in her room, but she couldn't find any alcohol -- the only thing she'll use to decontaminate her surroundings.

Her mother, Linda McIngvale, cannot seem to help.

A Family Problem

"There's parts of her that I see the OCD has taken away. You know, she used to be really carefree," Linda McIngvale said.

OCD has also been a heavy burden for Linda. Her daughter's symptoms started seven years ago, when McIngvale was just 12.

"I say in my mind, 'It's her battle. ... I can't battle it for her,'" Linda said. "You know, and that's what's so hard, is that you wish you could just say -- because it's not something she's chosen, so you say -- 'God, I wish I could make that go away.' But you can't."

After three hours of being taped, McIngvale was only able to get in the shower.

"And honestly, if I didn't have things to do, I would just sleep all day, because it's so much easier than to get up and start this whole process," she said.

Getting dressed is another rule-laden process.

"If they touch the inside of my drawer, which my drawer only comes up to here, I feel like I have to throw them out, like some of them, like that one's already contaminated," she said. "It actually -- even though they are getting contaminated -- it makes it easier if it's down to one because then I don't have a choice."

Sometimes McIngvale's restrictive routines can be frustrating and cause her to lash out in emotion. "This is when I really get frustrated because I know that right now, I am trying to find a shirt. I feel like all the ones in there are ruined. This is when I'm usually kicking the hole that's next to me, or whatever," she said.

McIngvale recently kicked a hole in her bathroom wall.

"I would say she probably never has good days," Linda said. "She probably just has not-so-bad ones."