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## Hoarding Disorder

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### Abstract

It is a pattern of behavior that is characterized by excessive acquisition and inability to discard large quantities of objects that cover the living areas of the home and cause significant distress. Researchers have only recently started studying hoarding and taking into consideration its severity at later stages it was defined as a mental disorder in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the DSM in 2013. Hoarding appears to be more common in people with psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, ADHD, etc. The author here wishes to bring into light the better way of analyzing severity and style of hoarding and devise a treatment plan that is more suitable to specific cases of hoarders.

**Keywords:** Hoarding; Clutter; Psychotherapy; Cognitive Therapy.

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### Introduction

People with hoarding disorder often don't see it as a problem, making treatment challenging. But intensive treatment can help people with hoarding disorder understand their compulsions and live safer, more enjoyable lives. Hoarding may not have much impact on your life, while in other cases it seriously affects your functioning on a daily basis. Hoarding disorder is different from collecting. People who have collections, such as stamps or model cars, deliberately search out specific items, categorize them and carefully display their collections. Although collections can be large, they aren't usually cluttered and they don't cause the distress and impairments that are part of hoarding disorder.

### Definition

Hoarding disorder is a persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions because of a perceived need to save them. A person with hoarding

disorder experiences distress at the thought of getting rid of the items. Excessive accumulation of items, regardless of actual value, occurs.

### Clinical Features

Hoarding disorder affects emotions, thoughts and behavior. Signs and symptoms may include:

- Persistent inability to part with any possession, regardless of its value
- Excessive attachment to possessions, including discomfort letting others touch or borrow them or distress at the idea of letting an item go
- Cluttered living spaces, making areas of the home unusable for the intended purpose, such as not being able to cook in the kitchen or use the bathroom to bathe
- Keeping stacks of newspapers, magazines or junk mail
- Letting food or trash build up to unusually excessive, unsanitary levels

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- Acquiring unneeded or seemingly useless items, such as trash or napkins from a restaurant
- Difficulty managing daily activities because of procrastination and trouble making decisions
- Moving items from one pile to another, without discarding anything
- Difficulty organizing items, sometimes losing important items in the clutter
- Shame or embarrassment
- Limited or no social interactions

*People with hoarding disorder typically save items because:*

- They believe these items will be needed or have value in the future
- The items have important emotional significance – serving as a reminder of happier times or representing beloved people or pets
- They feel safer when surrounded by the things they save

### ***Hoarding Animals***

People who hoard animals may collect dozens or even hundreds of pets. Animals may be confined inside or outside. Because of the large numbers, these animals often aren't cared for properly. The health and safety of the person and the animals are at risk due to unsanitary conditions

### **Causes**

Genetics, brain chemistry and stressful life events are being studied as possible causes.

### *Risk Factors Include*

- *Age:* Hoarding usually starts around ages 11 to 15, and it tends to get worse with age. Younger children may start saving items, such as broken toys, pencil nubs, outdated school papers and broken appliances. Hoarding is more common in older adults than in younger adults.
- *Personality:* Many people who have hoarding disorder have a temperament that includes indecisiveness.
- *Family History:* There is a strong association between having a family member who has hoarding disorder and having the disorder yourself.

- *Stressful Life Events:* Some people develop hoarding disorder after experiencing a stressful life event that they had difficulty coping with, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, eviction or losing possessions in a fire.
- *Social Isolation:* People with hoarding disorder are typically socially withdrawn and isolated. In many cases, the hoarding leads to social isolation. But, on the other hand, some people may turn to the comfort of hoarding because they're lonely.

### **Complications**

Hoarding disorder can cause a variety of complications, including:

- Unsanitary conditions that pose a risk to health
- Increased risk of falls
- Injury or being trapped by shifting or falling items
- A fire hazard
- An inability to perform daily tasks, such as bathing or cooking
- Poor work performance
- Family conflicts
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Financial problems
- Legal issues, including eviction

### **Diagnosis**

Diagnostic criteria for hoarding disorder include:

- You have difficulty throwing out or parting with your things, regardless of actual value.
- You feel a need to save these items, and the thought of discarding them upsets you.
- Because you don't discard any items, your possessions crowd and clutter your living areas and make the space unusable. If any living areas are uncluttered, it's because someone else cleaned them.
- Your hoarding causes you significant distress or problems functioning at work, socially or in other important areas, such as keeping yourself and others safe in your home.
- Your hoarding is not due to another medical condition, such as a brain injury, or another mental disorder symptom, such as decreased energy from major depression.

## Treatment

Treatment of hoarding disorder can be challenging because many people don't recognize the negative impact of hoarding on their lives or don't believe they need treatment.

There are two main types of treatment for hoarding disorder — psychotherapy and medications.

## Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy, also called talk therapy, is the primary treatment. Cognitive behavior therapy is the most common form of psychotherapy used to treat hoarding disorder. Try to find a therapist or other mental health provider who has experience in treating hoarding disorder.

*As part of cognitive behavior therapy, you may:*

- Explore why you feel compelled to hoard
- Learn to organize and categorize possessions to help you decide which ones to discard
- Improve your decision-making and coping skills
- Declutter your home during in-home visits by a therapist or professional organizer
- Learn and practice relaxation skills
- Attend family or group therapy
- Have periodic visits or ongoing treatment to help you keep up healthy habits

## Medications

Although the primary intervention for hoarding disorder is psychotherapy, research continues on the most effective ways to use medications in the treatment of hoarding disorder. The medications most commonly used are a type of antidepressant called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

## Home Care

*Here are some steps you can take to help care for yourself:*

- *Stick to your treatment plan:* It's hard work, and it's normal to have some setbacks over time. But treatment can help you feel better about yourself and reduce your hoarding.

- *Try to keep up personal hygiene and bathing:* If you have possessions piled in your tub or shower, resolve to move them so that you can bathe.
- *Make sure you're getting proper nutrition:* If you can't use your stove or reach your refrigerator, you may not be eating properly. Try to clear those areas so that you can prepare nutritious meals.
- *Reach out to others:* Hoarding can lead to isolation and loneliness, which in turn can lead to more hoarding. If you don't want visitors in your house, try to get out to see friends and family. Support groups for people with hoarding disorder can let you know that you are not alone and help you learn about your behavior and resources.
- *Look out for yourself:* Remind yourself that you don't have to live in chaos and distress — that you deserve better.
- *Take small steps:* With a professional's help, you can tackle one area at a time. Small wins like this can lead to big wins.
- *Focus on your goals:* To keep motivated to declutter, focus on your goals — living a healthier and more enjoyable life.
- *Do what's best for your pets:* If the number of pets you have has grown beyond your ability to care for them properly, remind yourself that they deserve to live healthy and happy lives — and that's not possible if you can't provide them with proper nutrition, sanitation and veterinary care.
- *Accept Assistance:* Local resources, professional organizers and loved ones can work with you to make decisions about how best to organize and unclutter your home and to stay safe and healthy.

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