

PREVENTING RITUALS

I must refrain to untrain my brain.

Exposure + Ritual prevention → → Anxiety → → Anxiety → → Compulsions

Ritual prevention is an integral part of exposing yourself to situations that provoke obsessions or compulsions. Concerns about external danger, negligence, incompetence, imperfection, bad luck, and scarcity usually have elaborate rituals associated with them. Identify your rituals and the amount of time you spend performing them to alleviate concerns. Examine the following for ideas:

Negligence—>Checking:

- Stove—30 times/day
- Trash can—3 times/ day
- Faucets—5 times/day
- Shower curtain closed—5 times/day

Disorder—>Straightening:

- Desk—10 min./day
- Drawers—30 min./day
- Books—30 min./week
- Collections—30 min./day
- Pictures—30 min./day

Germs

- Wash hands—20 times/ day
- Shower—90 min./day
- Scrub counters—30 min./ day

Scarcity

- Clipping/filing newspaper Articles—30 min./day
- Collecting discarded items—2 Hrs./day
- Shopping—8 hrs./week

Bad luck

- Praying—50 times/day
- Repeating the “right” thought—30 times/day
- Patting my heart—100 times/day

Appearance

- Showering—5 times/day
- Putting on makeup—2 hrs./day
- Ironing underwear—10 min./day

PRACTICE PREVENTION

Tendencies to ritualize can be turned into opportunities to practice prevention by practicing the following steps:

- Plan in advance how you will prevent rituals when you expose yourself to triggers. This gives you time to prepare yourself to change patterns. Sufficient time spent practicing exposure will take the edge off anxiety and make it easier not to ritualize. Your past attempts to stop rituals have probably been made on the spur of the moment.
- Use techniques for postponing rituals and refocusing on a pleasant activity to assist in ritual prevention.
- Do not engage in rituals to reduce anxiety when you begin exposure practice. Initially, this may involve “overkill”; for example, do not wash your hands all day; take one 10-minute shower a day; or do not save anything for a week.
- Clarify realistic standards by consulting with friends or professionals. Hands need to be washed only after using the toilet, before handling food, or when they’re visibly dirty. Stoves and front doors need to be checked only once before bed or leaving the house. Vacuuming, changing sheets, and dusting can be done weekly.
- Practice “symbolic” ritual prevention on a regular basis. Make it a point to carry a pocketknife. Leave one corner of a room disorganized. Rearrange decorative items regularly. Intentionally think “dangerous words.” Throw out unnecessary items frequently. Occasionally go to the store without brushing your hair or wearing lipstick.
- Be sure to identify all your rituals. You can use the above steps to eliminate them.