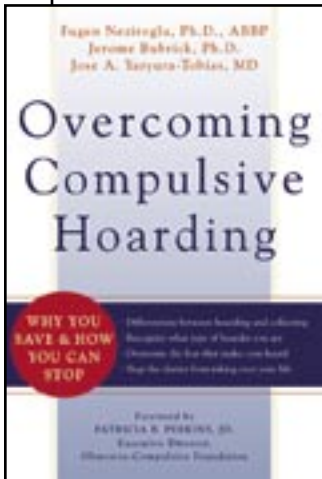


Compulsive hoarders hold on to everything...except their friends, their money, their peace of mind, and maybe even their health. Now, with the publication of *Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding* there's finally help for them.

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- **Compulsive hoarders can be compelled to amass everything from newspapers to animals. As a result their homes become crammed with so much clutter that they pose health and safety hazards to those living in them.**
- **About 50 percent of all evictions are due to unhealthy levels of clutter. It is not uncommon for children to be removed from homes because of the safety hazards posed by excessive clutter. Some states have created task forces to address the problem of compulsive hoarding.**
- **Scientists theorize that neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and dopamine, may play a role in the development of compulsive hoarding.**

To many of us it seems unfathomable. When we hear about the old woman who's amassed fifty-seven cats or the man who has twenty-five years worth of newspapers stacked in his living room we marvel at the sheer strangeness of it and wonder how they can function amid such colossal clutter. Maybe that's why it's easy to forget about the real-world consequences of compulsive hoarding. Evictions, divorce, health problems, financial strain, depression, even suicide: these are some of the outcomes of this under-recognized disorder. Now, for the first time those who struggle with it and their families have compassionate and authoritative help. *Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding* provides an understanding of how compulsive hoarding works and step-by-step help for getting it under control. Here's just some of what the authors have to say:

Fear drives compulsive hoarding. Hoarders are gripped by an inordinate amount of fear: fear of losing something, fear of not having enough of essential items like food and clothing, fear of forgetting about possessions. This is why they experience intense anxiety when trying to discard excess possessions and can feel agitated when others touch the items that they accumulate.

Hoarding is not the same as collecting. In fact, in many ways it's its polar opposite. Collectors feel proud of their possessions, hoarders are embarrassed of them; collectors keep their possessions organized and well-maintained, hoarders keep their's in disrepair and disarray; collectors are excited about new acquisitions, hoarders are ashamed of them. See page 3 for the "Are you a collector or a hoarder?" quiz.

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Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding: Why You Save & How You Can Stop
by Fugen Neziroglu, Ph.D., Jerome Bubrick, Ph.D., and Jose A. Yaryura-Tobias, MD
ISBN: 1-57224-349-X, \$14.95

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800-748-6273, www.newharbinger.com

Hoarding may be a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Some of the current professional literature indicates that hoarding is a symptom of OCD. One study suggests that between one quarter and one third of those with OCD hoard.

Hoarders often suffer from depression. Depression can spur compulsive hoarding and it can also be the result of it. Many hoarders report feeling its hallmark symptoms of hopelessness, self-loathing, and sadness. When depression is the result of hoarding it's called *secondary depression*.

There are a few different types of saving patterns that give us insight into why people hoard. These include:

- **Sentimental saving**, in which people compulsively save items that are associated with positive emotions. For example, someone who remembers that he picked up a matchbook the night he had a happy dinner out with his family may compulsively save matchbooks.
- **Instrumental saving**, which occurs when the hoarder feels like he or she must save items because they could need them in the future.
- **Saving for aesthetic value**, which is not as common as the other kinds, but can still turn problematic. One woman that the authors worked with filled her house to the rafters with "junk art," which was usually welded pieces of metal. Some hoarders save items of a particular color, texture, shape, or size.

Compulsive hoarding can wreak havoc on families. When families are forced to live with excessive clutter resentment and anger develop. Children are unable to play freely in the home. Spouses and other adults don't have sufficient living space and mobility. It's not surprising, then, that the authors have seen the spouses of compulsive hoarders file for divorce and custody battles ensue because of the unsafe conditions that clutter presents for children. Compulsive hoarding can also upset a family's economy. When a hoarder compulsively purchases new items everyone in the family may find themselves in difficult financial straits.

The clutter created by compulsive hoarding can result in health problems and safety hazards. "In our experience, people who live in clutter are more likely to experience...headaches, respiratory problems (asthma, coughing), allergies, fatigue or lethargy, insomnia or sleeping difficulties," say the authors. The dust, dirt, molds, and fungi that build up underneath and throughout clutter are the likely culprits. Hoarders are often unable to vacuum or clean countertops or furniture and clutter may prevent them from cleaning up spilled food or knocked over plants. When pets are in the home other health hazards can arise. Dogs may not be able to navigate the clutter quickly enough to tell their owners that they need to go outside. Cats may not be able to access their litter boxes. If a cat moves freely between indoors and out *toxoplasmosis* becomes a concern. This is a parasite that lives in cat feces and can affect those with weakened immune systems. It also may cause birth defects or mental retardation if a pregnant woman becomes infected. In addition, clutter can translate into a fire hazard and can block radiators and vents, causing poor circulation.

Hoarders may be compelled to take free stuff that they don't really want. For some hoarders the "Free, Take One" sign issues a non-negotiable demand. Pamphlets, grocery bags, magazines, and flyers can start to take over their homes as a result. Some hoarders may even go through garbage cans and Dumpsters looking for free items.

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Researchers speculate that neurobiological factors may play a role in compulsive hoarding. Two major neurotransmitters, serotonin and dopamine, are currently being studied to determine if they are involved in compulsive hoarding. Serotonin is associated with OCD, so some clinicians infer that it may play a role in compulsive hoarding also. Because dopamine is responsible for regulating emotion and mood some think that it too may be a factor in hoarding.

The authors go on to arm the reader with the skills and information they need to take back their homes and lives from compulsive hoarding. They offer them:

- An overview of the latest treatment options, including medication and cognitive behavioral therapy;
- Quizzes for determining if they have compulsive hoarding, identifying the fears behind it, assessing the health risks posed by their clutter, pinpointing their style of saving, and more;
- Self-help strategies and step-by-step exercises that address the common triggers of compulsive hoarding and help them avoid the pitfalls they may encounter when trying to recover from it;
- Relapse prevention strategies; and
- Guidance for clearing the clutter and beginning a regular cleaning routine.

Quiz: Are You a Collector or a Hoarder?

Here is a summary of the differences between hoarders and collectors. Check the boxes that you feel represent you. The more boxes you have checked in each category, the more likely you fall into that category.

Collectors

- feel proud of their possessions
- keep their possessions organized and well maintained
- find joy in their possessions and willingly display them to others
- attend meetings or conferences with others who share their interest
- enjoy conversations about their possessions
- budget their time and money around their possessions
- feel satisfaction when making additions to the collection

Hoarders

- feel embarrassed by their possessions
- have their possessions scattered randomly, often without any functional organization
- have clutter, often resulting in the loss of functional living space
- feel uncomfortable with others seeing their possessions, or outright refuse to let others view their possessions
- often have debt, sometimes extreme
- feel ashamed, sad, or depressed after acquiring additional items

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About the Authors of *Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding*



Fugen Neziroglu, Ph.D., ABBP, is a board-certified cognitive and behavior psychologist involved in the research and treatment of anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorders, trichotillomania, hoarding, body dysmorphic disorder, and hypochondriasis at the Bio-Behavioral Institute in Great Neck, NY. She is professor of psychology at Hofstra University in Long Island, NY, and professor of psychology at New York University. A scientist and clinician who has presented and published over 150 articles in scientific journals and written many book chapters, she is coauthor of seven books with Jose Yaryura-Tobias. She has received recognition both nationally and internationally for her research contributions in the area of obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorders. She is listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in Medicine and Healthcare*, and *Who's Who in Frontier Science and Technology*. She is on the Scientific Advisory Board of the Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation and is the former Vice President of the American Board of Behavioral Psychologists.

Dr. Neziroglu is a frequent guest on national and local radio and television programs. She has appeared on:

- *20/20*
- *Dateline NBC*
- *48 Hours*
- The Discovery Channel
- Fox News.

Jerome Bublick, Ph.D., is a behavior and cognitive psychologist specializing in the treatment of obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorders and hoarding in children and adults.

Jose Yaryura-Tobias, MD, is a biological psychiatrist and an internist with over forty years experience. He is professor of psychiatry at New York University and the medical director at the Bio-Behavioral Institute.

Suggested Interview Questions

1. How do you differentiate between compulsive hoarders and those who just like to collect things?
2. What are some items that hoarders typically save?
3. You say that there is some indication that hoarding is a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Can you tell us a little about why some clinicians suspect this?
4. What are some different types of hoarding?

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5. What effect does hoarding have on the family, particularly the children and the spouses of those who hoard?
6. What are some of the physiological, sociological, and psychological theories of what causes hoarding?
7. Hoarders may be evicted or lose their children because of the safety hazard posed by clutter. Can you tell us what the hazards typically are and what local governments are doing to address the problem of hoarding?
8. Imagine a spouse of a compulsive hoarder who tells you that his or her partner's hoarding is destroying their relationship, but the hoarder refuses to get help or even acknowledge the problem. What do you say to him or her?
9. What are some of the treatment options for compulsive hoarding?
10. Once hoarders have overcome their compulsion to save what can they do to prevent relapse?

Raves for *Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding*

“Although there are a number of self-help books on organizing and dealing with clutter, none describe the psychological aspects of the problem. This book is the first of its kind and provides an up-to-date account of what we know about the psychology of compulsive hoarding together with exercises designed to deal with the problem. It will be a useful resource for anyone struggling with a hoarding problem.”

—Randy O. Frost, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Smith College in Northampton, MA

“This self-help book for hoarding is easy to read and includes scores of useful techniques for removing and organizing clutter and avoiding its return. Colorful analogies punctuate the instructions for a cognitive and behavioral program that is practical and systematic. The authors offer basic rules, helpful hints, and good caveats for managing this difficult problem.”

—Gail Steketee, Ph.D., professor of social work at Boston University School of Social Work and author of *Overcoming Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*

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