

*Here is an example of one of the searched items on hoarding from the standpoint of recovery from an addiction. This site has a few interesting articles. They also point out a support group access like AA for hoarders who want help themselves.*

*Just put HOARDING in their search box. Sister Maria*

<https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/mental-health/hoarding/related/hoarding-myths/>

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[Hoarding disorder](#) is characterized by difficulty parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value. Serious hoarding problems may be present in at least [1 in 50 people](#), but estimates could be even higher. Hoarding affects a person's emotional, physical, financial and social aspects of life.

Hoarding is well-known due to reality show depictions. However, there some confusion exists concerning hoarding behavior. A better understanding of hoarding disorder can clear up the myths related to this disorder and shed light on the facts.

## **Myth 1: Hoarding is the same as being disorganized.**

**Fact: While everyone can experience periods of disorganization, hoarding is a chronic mental health condition.**

Being disorganized does not qualify as a mental health disorder. At times, most people have periods where their car, bedroom or their entire house is disorganized. After spending time cleaning up, throwing away non-essentials and organizing items, the disorganization is resolved for most people.

While it's true that hoarders struggle with organizing possessions, their reasons for disorganization stem from accumulated clutter that they are unable to part with. As a result, their personal spaces are cluttered and disorganized.

Regarding hoarders, clutter is usually found in every room, with little space left for walking. The clutter is difficult for hoarders to get rid of. There is no limit as to what hoarders will keep; sometimes useful items can be found in large amounts, and

sometimes items like newspapers, receipts, mail packets, and fliers are kept. The fear of throwing out something that may be needed causes hoarders severe anxiety.

The number of items pile up eventually taking over the function of the rooms and the house in general. Because they are unwilling to part with items, the clutter becomes too large and too difficult to organize.

## Myth 2: Hoarders are lazy.

**Fact: Hoarding is a mental health disorder, whereas laziness is a choice.**

A dirty or unkept home can be thought of as the product of laziness. Laziness is a choice and implies the lack of desire to work. Hoarding is a mental health disorder that affects how a person views their possessions.

The accumulation of possessions for a hoarder could be the [result of](#):

- Compulsive buying
- Compulsive acquisition of free items
- Compulsively searching for unique items

Once items are in the possession of a hoarder, they will not throw them away. This desire to hang on to items can stem from feelings of guilt, fear or anger at merely the thought of getting rid of them. Often there exists an obsessive fear that one may run out of an item in the future and this adds to the accumulation of things. Some hoarders may see value in items that are discarded or unwanted by other people, even going as far as to believe that the objects have feelings and they are responsible for them.

## Myth 3: People with hoarding disorder don't notice the mess.

**Fact: Hoarders are aware of the clutter in their homes but cannot bring themselves to throw things away.**

For a person without a hoarding disorder, it may seem a simple task to just pick up the mess, especially if it bothers you. For a person living with a hoarding disorder, they cannot simply pick up the mess. Many hoarders are aware of the amount of possessions they have and some may find it overwhelming.

The items build up and clutter living spaces, filling up bathtubs, closets, beds, hallways and floor space. The congestion leaves limited space to walk and move around in. Hoarders likely notice the mess, but they cannot sift through their items and determine what is necessary to hold on to and what is not. To them, everything they have is necessary.

The distress from the amount of possessions is a double-edged sword and they cannot get rid of anything due to increased anxiety. Furthermore, important items such as bills and letters can get lost in the many piles and stacks around the house, leading to other complications in their lives.

## **Myth 4: Hoarding is a form of OCD.**

**Fact: Hoarding has OCD tendencies but it is classified as a distinct disorder separate from OCD.**

Compulsive hoarding used to be considered behavioral criteria for the diagnosis of [obsessive-compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#). As of 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5), now classifies hoarding disorder as a stand-alone condition within a group of obsessive-compulsive and related disorders including OCD, body dysmorphic disorder, trichotillomania and excoriation disorder.

The compulsive nature of hoarding leads to compulsions in buying and accumulating items. Keeping them is an obsession. OCD can have many forms of compulsions and obsessions. With hoarding, however, the compulsion and obsessions are tied to acquiring and keeping items. This type of compulsive behavior is used to alleviate pain and discomfort. Although there are the initial feelings of joy and excitement upon the acquisition of new items, their behavior of keeping all items indefinitely is an attempt to decrease the psychological pain they feel such as anxiety, fear, and guilt.

## **Myth 5: Hoarders are simply collectors.**

**Fact: Hoarding is a disorder that goes far beyond the simple hobby of collecting.**

Collectors usually focus on one type of item, such as coins, stamps, baseball cards or memorabilia. Collectors can have a small or large collection. Collectors are also known to be proud of their collections, often keeping them in organized display cases for others to see and admire. Collectors usually find satisfaction when they've added to their collection and maintained a budget for the items they purchased.

Hoarders do not have orderly collections for others to see. Their possessions are not organized but they are in disarray. In comparison to specific items, collectors may keep, hoarders, save random items that are stored haphazardly. Often, hoarders are embarrassed by the number of possessions they have and are uncomfortable allowing others to see them. Clutter crowds living spaces and the initial joy that may be felt when acquiring something new quickly turns to shame and sadness. Hoarders are often found to be in debt due to the excessive accumulation of items.

## **Myth 6: Hoarding is a recent phenomenon.**

**Fact: Hoarding behavior has been recognized throughout history.**

Hoarding is not a newly recognized behavior. The history of hoarding dates back to 1909 there was a case of two brothers hoarded and eventually buried themselves in their mansion in Harlem. After that incident, it was called [Collyer's syndrome](#) in honor of their name.

The modern look at hoarding and its increase in occurrence can be partly attributed to the ease of obtaining items that are free or inexpensive. Most items that hoarders own are not considered valuable. The modern understanding of hoarding helped to shed light on the causes of the disorder. It is often attributed to a combination of environmental, biological, genetic and psychological processes. Psychologists agree that usually a [traumatic or acute trigger](#) can cause the hoarding behavior to start, such as the death of a loved one, and it grows into a bigger challenge from there. The risk of hoarding is also higher if a family member has compulsive hoarding behavior.

## **Myth 7: Hoarding only affects older people.**

**Fact: Compulsive hoarding can affect all age groups.**

According to the [International OCD Foundation](#), hoarding behaviors can start in the early teens, although the average age of most people who eventually seek treatment is 50. Most hoarding behaviors are reported to begin [before the age of 20](#) and increase in severity over time.

The constant and persistent clutter poses threats to overall health and safety. Structural damage and fire hazards pose threats to hoarders and those nearby. The lack of living space and the function of proper rooms and appliances can mean living without heat or other comforts. Rather than allowing a repairman in to fix broken items, hoarders will cope with the malfunctions instead.

Failure to maintain proper home conditions can lead to eviction and homelessness for some hoarders. If the hoarder lives with family, there may be conflict leading to anger and resentment among family members whose efforts to help the hoarder are turned away. If children are involved, the living conditions could lead to the hoarder losing custody of their children

## **Myth 8: Cleaning up the hoard solves the problem.**

**Fact: Cleaning up the mess without addressing the root of the problem, leads to a relapse in hoarding behavior.**

Well-intentioned friends and family may think it's helpful or a good idea to clean up for a hoarder. They may hope that doing so will solve the hoarding problem. Cleaning out the home without treating the underlying problem does not cure the disorder.

Many families, with the help of community agencies, spend much time, effort and money to clean up the home of an individual with compulsive hoarding only to have the hoarding problem return a few months later. Also, clearing out a home as a surprise,

without the express approval of the hoarder, can lead to distrust and a refusal of any future help.

For a person to receive help, they must first be motivated to change. This change is not something that can be forced. Every person's situation is different. Some know they need help and some are unaware and uninterested in the well-intentioned efforts of others. When someone is willing to accept [hoarding treatment](#) the focus of treatment is usually on behavior modification.

If you or someone you know is struggling with compulsive hoarding and self-medicates with substances or alcohol, [contact the Recovery Village](#) today. Call to speak with a representative about how individualized treatment programs can address addiction alongside any co-occurring mental health disorders, such as hoarding. You deserve a healthier future.

- **Sources**

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