

You think you are normal

You were born healthy; all your body parts are fully functioning. You grasp information like your peers do. You progress and mature at the rate you are expected to.

So, you question every now and then whether you have OCD. Those doubts are quickly dismissed as you assume that your need to be precise and do things according to plan are simply because you're a Capricorn, and therefore you are a perfectionist.

I remember being 9 or 10 years old and thinking about whether I have OCD because I enjoyed doing things a certain amount of times, like turning the light switch on and off 3 times. I quickly dismissed these thoughts, truly believing that OCD was rare and those who have OCD are easily diagnosed as they would turn the light switch on and off 100 times, not 3.

Your face begins to change. You no longer have a cute little nose. Now, your nose has a bump on it and you are really insecure about people seeing your profile, especially while you are laughing. You ask your mom if you could get a nose job when you are older. She agrees that if you need and want one in a few years, you can get one. You ask your sister if your nose is big. She replies that it fits your face and doesn't bother her. She doesn't notice it when she speaks to you. You feel calm for a few days. Then, you start checking out your profile in your room. You use a small mirror and a large one to see it from every angle. You scrutinize it. You analyze it, trying to figure out whether or not you can really trust your sister's words. You consciously know that your family tells you the truth. You were raised by a mom who values unconditional honesty. No matter what. You know you could trust their words. You hear them saying how beautiful you are. How you look like someone drew you. You feel better for the day. You go to sleep. The next morning you wake up and look at yourself in the mirror. Then, once again, you hate your nose and start doubting what your family said to you merely a day ago. Subconsciously something tells you to stay by the mirror. Don't leave it. You can't leave until you've come to terms with your appearance. You look and look some more. You start believing that you need to have everything else about you look perfect so you can feel beautiful and not scare people away. It does not matter what anyone else says, you don't *feel* pretty. You remind yourself that you are so young, only 12. In a few years you will be able to feel pretty and like your nose. If not, in a few years you can get a nose job.

Time passes. You are now 16. You notice you are breaking out and your skin starts to really bother you. You seek others to reassure you that it is normal to feel so insecure during this time. Again, you associate your thoughts as normal to have at your age.

You start to wear more make-up; this seems normal to do. You wear makeup during all hours except for when you go to sleep. Then you use a special soap to remove acne. You dab pimple spot treatment all over your face in the hope of waking up the next day to find clean, pimple-free skin. You wake up disappointed when you see that your

skin is still problematic. You start spending an hour each morning to apply make-up. One day you think you look OK without it, but already got so used to applying it everyday that you put it on anyway. Now no one can see you without makeup, not even when you are home all day with your family. You need to cover it up - Or else you constantly get up and go the nearest mirror to check if your pimples are gone. When you don't have a mirror you feel your skin to see if there are any bumps. Even the smallest bump consumes you and drives you to discover the secret to guaranteeing perfect skin. You read about how sugar causes acne. You cut out all sugar, believing that you will never get a pimple again. You still break out but you tell yourself that you still have less pimples than when you ate sweets. You analyze everything you put in your mouth to be SURE that there is no added sugar inside. You look up more ways to get clear skin. You start washing your sheets more often, try not to sleep on your face, make sure to never touch your face unless you just washed your hands, limit dairy products, go vegan - all to get perfect skin. Don't use sunscreen because it will make you break out like crazy. Don't get sunburned because you will see even more skin imperfections, especially all your scars. Getting facials haunt you. You could always get more scars from them since once a dermatologist dug so deep into your skin that she left you a scar on your cheek. You get into a deep depression and the only way to get out is by going to a dermatologist to heal the scars. You try Fraxel laser to no avail.

Then, the attacks worsen. You are now 18. You pick at your skin all the time to clean it. You go into a trance and need to pop all the pimples you see. The moment you start popping them, you feel good. It's a risk - sometime it helps, sometimes it leads to a never-ending cycle that leads to more scars. The moment you have nothing left to pick, you begin to feel so ashamed. Holy shit. What did I do to my face! You feel a dark pit in your heart. You feel sorrow like you never felt before. Then, you cancel your plans. No point in going out and showing the world how you ruined your face. For the next week you hope the scabs wont turn to more scars. You carry this shame with you everywhere you go. You only wish you could look normal. Have the same skin as your sister and mom.

You are 21. Things seem to be going well. But it's only temporary. The worst is yet to come. Your sister is getting married. You are looking good but then you go out to dinner with her, her fiancé and both of your families. You order a dish without realizing the food is friend. You eat it. Try not to make a big deal. You go out with a friend after. All seems fine. Then you get home and look in the mirror. You are sure you will break out from the greasy dish so you start preemptively cleaning your face. It only gets worse and you create a scab. The next day you feel so low, you can't eat. You see you created a scar and barely eat the whole week. Just as you are starting to move on from the new scar, your brother attacks your face. He rips deep into your eyelid, nose and cheek. This will definitely scar you tell yourself. You are a mess - you hit rock bottom and go crazy. After what you've been through, you know you need treatment. You wont be able to survive any other way.

Treatment isn't easy but it's amazing how your doctors get you. They know what you have been through. This knowledge is more than your family or any other support system can offer. It takes a lot to readjust, but with this help you can finally move forward and be happy. You can eat whatever you want without shame or regret. Pimples stop consuming you. Scars stop haunting you. You can share your success story and strengthen others who need it. Life after treatment has never been better. Or freer.