

Understanding Sexual Addiction

Objective

To identify if you have an addiction to sexual behaviors or sexual materials.

What to Know

No one wants to admit they are a sex addict, but if your sexual behavior is negatively impacting your life, your safety, or your health, you need to look at your choices before they cause serious problems.

The following are traits typically seen in people with a sex addiction:

- Extreme preoccupation with sexual fantasies and behaviors, for six months or longer
- Loss of control over sexual behaviors and an inability to quit or cut back
- Negative consequences related to sexual behaviors, including relationship problems, issues at work or school, mental health problems, diminished self-esteem, financial concerns, loss of interest in hobbies, legal trouble, and so forth
- Consistent sexual objectification of self and/or others
- Heightened tolerance and escalation
- Denial there is a problem
- Isolation from others

What to Do

Check off the following statements that apply to you.

My sexual fantasies, seeking sex, and having sex have are more important than other things in my life, such as work, family, and non-sexual hobbies.

I have regrets about the amount of time I spend searching for, fantasizing about, and having sex, and/or masturbating.

I have promised myself to stop visiting sex websites, viewing pornography, using sexual or hookup apps, or engaging in real-life sexual activities – but I haven't been able to stop.

I am involved in secretive sexual affairs or casual sex situations.

I frequently spend time online looking for sex.

I don't like it when asked to reduce or eliminate my sexual activities.

People close to me have expressed concerns about my sexual activity.

I view, download, share, or distribute illegal sexual imagery or engage in illegal sexual activity (e.g., voyeurism, exhibitionism, prostitution, illegal porn).

I have been arrested, formally warned, or otherwise reprimanded because of my sexual behavior.

My sexual behavior has caused me to lose— a romantic relationship, job, money, self-esteem, or community standing.

My partner says I have broken his/her trust.

I hide my sexual behaviors from others.

I frequently lie about my sexual behavior.

My sexual behavior has made me withdraw from others.

My sexual behaviors have caused many problems in my life,

I have experienced “porn impotence” – the inability to perform with a real-life partner because of masturbation and porn use.

I am tired of lying and keeping secrets to cover up my sexual behaviors.

I am having significant marital problems (e.g., separation, divorce) as a result of my sexual behavior.

I am posting profiles on dating sites primarily to hook up with anonymous people.

I have contracted a sexually transmitted infection because of anonymous and/or multiple hookups.

I am worried I will lose everything because I have repeatedly tried to stop problematic sexual behaviors and realized I can't stop on your own.

Add up your check marks: _____

If you checked off 0 statements, you are probably not a sex addict.

If you checked off 1-5 statements, you are at risk of becoming a sex addict.

If you checked off six or more statements, you are probably struggling with a sex addiction.

With internet pornography readily available, you probably use the internet to find sexual partners, download sexual materials, or visit sexually explicit sites. Which of the following qualities of internet pornography entice you? Check off any of the following that apply.

Anonymity. You believe “nobody will know.”

Isolation and depersonalization. You like that the experience is more of a transaction without meaningful connection.

Desire to act out a fantasy. You have fantasies that you're unable to act out with a partner.

Desire to “shop around.” You like the idea of sex being a commodity you can sample.

Numbing out. Potential dangers and/or consequences are lessened if you are online.

Immediate accessibility. Internet porn is easily available 24/7.

Now, answer the following questions.

Describe your earliest memory of hearing, seeing, or learning about sex.

At what age did you first see pornography? _____

Were you sexually abused in childhood or adolescence? _____

Were you physically or verbally abused as a child? _____

Did you receive straightforward and accurate information from parents, caregivers, or teachers about healthy sexuality and relationships? _____

List examples of your preoccupation or obsession with sex.

Write down how this makes you feel (e.g., embarrassed, weak, ashamed).

Describe any attempts you have made to reduce or eliminate your sexual behaviors. Include the length of your success.

Why do you think you have been unsuccessful at stopping excessive sexual behaviors? Be specific.

List any negative consequences you have experienced related to sex (e.g., separation from partner, reprimand at work, legal problems).

Did any of these negative consequences affect your sexual behavior? If yes, in what ways?

Do you feel you are powerless over some of your sexual behaviors? If yes, describe.

List examples of your powerlessness over your sexual behaviors. Use the following: “Even though I (*describe consequence*), I continue to (*describe sexual activity*).

What is one thing you can do to take some control over your sexual behaviors?

Who can help you? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
