



**Compulsive
Sexual Behavior
and
Sex Addiction:**

**Too much of a
good thing?**

MY STORY

I began using pornography when I was 14, mostly out of curiosity. I would sneak into my father's room and look at his hidden magazines. The more I saw, the more I wanted. Throughout my teens, I stole porn from adult bookstores, which I wasn't even old enough to enter, legally. As an adult, I rented pornographic videos. It took harder and harder-core material to satisfy me. I eventually turned to live pornography, feeding my addiction at strip clubs and peep shows.

What began as a casual thing became an obsession. I couldn't stay away. And the more pornography I looked at the more deviant material I sought. I kept telling myself I would stop. I felt so ashamed afterwards, and I swore that every time was the last. But I found myself doing it again and again. This was my darkest secret, because anyone who knew what I was doing would surely reject me.

By the time I was 20 years old, I was spending between \$300 and \$400 a week on my addiction. I began going to prostitutes because my wife wouldn't act out the scenes I had seen in porn movies—graphic, violent fantasies. My family relationships suffered. I visited clubs and prostitutes during my lunch break and sometimes again on my way home from work. My career suffered, too.

At 26, all of the shame and anger and aggression inside me built up so high that I snapped. I saw a woman alone at night who represented everything I had been fantasizing about. I followed her to her car, broke in and attempted to rape her. She got away, and later turned me in.

That was 20 years ago. It has been a long and painful road to recovery. Intensive individual, group and family counseling have helped me overcome my addiction forgive myself and respect women. If I can do it, any one can.

Addicted to sex?

Can you be addicted to sex, just as you can to drugs or alcohol? Ask a sex addict — or someone who's been affected by an addict's behavior — a spouse, child, other family member, friend or victim. Their experience says: "yes."

Although it's often portrayed as a "victimless" individual choice, sex addiction can have very negative and long-lasting effects on addicts, on those in relationships with them and on society.

How big of a problem is sex addiction or compulsion?

Over the past several decades, our society has grown in its understanding of drug, alcohol and food addictions, but only in recent years have we begun to understand sex addiction. Men and women use sex as a mood-altering substance — like drugs or alcohol — to cope with relational pain. Sex addiction is characterized by persons using sex to get a "high," and then finding themselves needing ever-greater or more powerful "doses." Sex addiction affects 3-6% of our population.¹

Most sexual and
pornographic addiction
begin in middle
childhood or early
adolescence.

— Victor Cline, Ph.D.

What does sex addiction/ compulsion look like?

Sex addicts engage in obsessive/compulsive sexual behavior that causes severe stress to themselves and their families. They make sex the center of their lives, become willing to sacrifice what they value most and exhibit behaviors such as:

- compulsive heterosexual and homosexual relationships
- exhibitionism
- voyeurism
- incest
- rape and violence
- compulsive masturbation
- obsession with pornography
- prostitution
- indecent phone calls
- child molesting²

For the sex addict, each external sexual act is a desperate attempt to be involved in a relationship without being truly known and having to take the risks involved in developing real intimacy.³ Addicts are unable to stop their involvement in behaviors they generally *know* are destructive, and usually progress to more and more dangerous behaviors.

"Addiction is a relationship - a pathological relationship - in which sexual obsession replaces people."

—Patrick Carnes, Ph.D.

Is Pornography a Factor in Sex Addiction/Compulsion?

Society continues to debate whether pornography is positive/neutral (entertaining or educational) or harmful. The word itself comes from the Greek words “porno” and “graphia” meaning “depictions of the activities of whores,”⁴ and generally means “material (as books or a photograph) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement.”⁵ Pornography, including that which is readily available on the Internet, degrades, objectifies and dehumanizes women and children.

Dr. Archibald D. Hart observes in his book, *The Sexual Man: Masculinity Without Guilt*: “Most young males have their sexual beliefs and attitudes shaped by pornography. Exposure often begins at age thirteen. This distorts their views of how women feel about sex and what can reasonably be expected from sex. . .”⁶

Among 932 sex addicts studied, 90% of men and 77% of women said pornography was significant to their addictions. The same study found that childhood sexual abuse and frequent use of pornography accompanied by masturbation are key parts of the formation of sexually addictive behavior.⁷

In research conducted with rapists, it was found that almost half used pornography depicting consenting sex to arouse themselves before seeking out a victim.⁸ In another study, sex offenders said that pornography increased their appetites for deviant activities.⁹

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— W.L. Marshall, Ph.D.

Profile of a Sex Addict

Background — 83% report being sexually abused, 73% physically abused and 97% emotionally abused/neglected as children.¹⁰

Education/Socioeconomic — 42% earn more than \$30,000/year and 58% are college graduates¹¹; 65% are professionals with a college and/or graduate degree.¹²

Emotional State — Addicts feel powerless and out of control, and need to maintain an environment in which they are in control and never feel bad; they are attracted to “persons” in pornography who can’t say “no,” abandon or reject them; 83% have other addictions such as alcoholism, chemical dependency, eating disorders or compulsive working, spending or gambling problems.¹³

Number of Partners/Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) — Addicts may have many partners and frequent sex in a variety of circumstances. Many times, the fear of contracting AIDS or other STIs is not enough to make them stop their behavior.



Dynamics of Sex Addiction

Victor Cline, Ph.D., an expert on the effects of pornography and its relationship to sex addictions and abuse, says four factors characterize the condition:

Addiction — Pornography provides a very powerful sexual stimulant or aphrodisiac effect, followed by sexual release, most often through masturbation. The exciting and powerful imagery can then be recalled and elaborated on in subsequent fantasies.

Escalation — Over time, addicts require rougher and more explicit and deviant material to get “high.” They may push their partners into increasingly bizarre sexual activities. And they come to prefer the imagery of pornography, accompanied by masturbation, to sexual intercourse itself, diminishing their capacity to express real affection.

Desensitization — Material (in books, magazines, or films/videos) which was first perceived as shocking, illegal, repulsive or immoral — though still sexually arousing — is seen as acceptable. The sexual activity depicted becomes legitimized in the person’s mind, and he/she comes to believe that “everybody does it.”

Acting Out Sexually — There is an increasing tendency to act out behaviors viewed in pornography. Addiction locks persons into these behaviors — no matter what the negative consequences. It disturbs marital and family bonds, and increases the possibility of a person committing a serious sex crime.¹⁴

"Pornography is the gateway to sexual addiction."

—Stephen F. Arterburn

The affected person has the responsibility to take the first step to break the addiction.

– Victor Cline, Ph.D.

Recognizing sex addiction

To help determine whether or not you are a sex addict ask yourself if...

1. you ever thought you needed help for your sexual thinking or behavior?
2. you would be better off if you didn't keep "giving in?"
3. sex or stimuli are controlling you?
4. you ever tried to stop or limit doing what you felt was wrong in your sexual behavior?
5. you resort to sex to escape, relieve anxiety, or because you can't cope?
6. you feel guilt, remorse, or depression afterward?
7. your pursuit of sex has become more compulsive?
8. it interferes with relations with your spouse?
9. you have to resort to images or memories during sex?
10. an irresistible impulse arises when the other party makes overtures or sex is offered?
11. you keep going from one "relationship" or lover to another?

"Without treatment, the disease of sex addiction eventually engulfs the person. For progression to stop, symptoms must not just be eliminated, but the core of the problem must be healed."

—Stephen F. Arterburn

12. you feel the “right relationship” would help you stop lusting, masturbating, or being so promiscuous?
13. you have a destructive need -- a desperate sexual or emotional need for someone?
14. pursuit of sex make you careless for yourself or the welfare of your family or others?
15. your effectiveness or concentration decreased as sex has become more compulsive?

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– Patrick Carnes, Ph.D.

16. you lose time from work for it?
17. you turn to a lower environment when pursuing sex?
18. you want to get away from the sex partner as soon as possible after the act?
19. you still masturbate or have sex with others when you and your partner are sexually compatible?
20. you’ve ever been arrested for a sex-related offense?

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If you recognize yourself or someone you know in the above questions, you may want to talk with a professional counselor or 12-Step group. There is hope — and effective treatment.

Real help is available...today

If you or someone else has a sex addiction problem, the steps to recovery are:

1. **Face the problem.** Admit that sex addiction is a problem. Most people need someone to help them take this step.
2. **Seek help in a “safe” place.** The most effective programs treat the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of the problem, and involve both of these elements:
 - **Psychologist/counselor** — a skilled professional can provide objective, diagnostic and clinical help — inpatient or outpatient (including phone consultation).
 - **Support group** — A group offers the “arms and legs” of acceptance, understanding, affirmation and loving care. Groups using AA’s 12 Steps are one of the most proven paths to recovery. Persons accept their addiction, and admit that they are powerless over their sexual behavior and that their lives are unmanageable. Those involved in Sexaholics Anonymous, for example, discover that victory over this mental-spiritual obsession brings release from the “acting out” in any of its forms. Then they begin rebuilding relationships by taking responsibility for what they’ve done, making amends where possible and embracing healthy values. (There are 12 step groups that are Christian focused.)
3. **Maintain/strengthen recovery.** As with other addictions, maintaining recovery is a day-to-day, lifetime process. Recovery gains strength as the person deals with the addiction’s root issues. After-care groups are an option.



Treating sex addiction can be likened to getting medical help for a badly broken leg. A person needs to seek emergency treatment, follow the doctor's orders and be rehabilitated. Time for healing is part of the prescription.

Common Questions/Concerns

Will my confidentiality be protected? Addicts who want to change require a “safe” place — a counselor or 12 Step group — where their confidentiality will be respected.

What if I can't afford treatment? Your insurance may cover all or most of the cost. Many programs charge on a sliding scale; 12-Step groups are free. It's always worth the investment.

How can I help my spouse or friend recover? Educate yourself about addiction so you can be an encourager and avoid “enabling” behavior that delays recovery. Since the spouse often feels responsible, he/she should join a support group for spouses of addicts and seek professional help also. Realize that there may be occasional relapses.

What can parents do to help prevent sex addiction? Teach children that sex is a beautiful gift, and that anything that degrades the love between a man and a woman is wrong. Warn them about pornography. Cultivate a healthy openness of communication so they'll feel free to talk with you about anything without fear, guilt or shame.

Typical sex addiction scenarios

- A salesman who travels extensively promises himself before each trip that he won't watch the hard-core cable TV movies in his hotel, *but he does anyway.*
- A woman who reads romance novels fantasizes herself into their fictitious sexual situations. After a while, she prefers her fantasy world to real life and tries to re-create it in a series of affairs. She tells herself she can quit, *but can't.*
- An attorney visits hard-core pornography outlets in his area. He fears damage to his reputation if he's found out and always tells himself, "this is the last time," *but it never is.*
- A wife is sexually involved outside of her marriage. Terrified of the potential damage to her husband and family if discovered, she promises herself she'll stop, *but she doesn't.*
- An executive repeatedly demands certain sexual behaviors from his wife, but is always turned down. Frustrated, he turns to prostitutes. After each episode, he's remorseful and tell himself he won't do it again, *but he does.*
- A teenager desperately seeks affection by becoming sexually involved with one man after another. After repeatedly failing to get the affection she is after, she wants to stop, *but can't.*



Don't Let Another Day Pass

If you — or someone else — is reluctant to seek help, please consider that addiction is progressive. Knowing there is a sexual addiction problem and not seeking help can be likened to knowing that there are cancer cells active in your body and doing nothing about it. There's no better time than now.

Call us today for a referral to counselors, groups, tapes or other resources — resources that can make a real difference to you or someone you care for.

**National Coalition for the
Protection
of Children & Families**
513/521-6227 or ncpcf@eos.net

Victims HelpLine
(offers referrals, information and support)
1-800-583-2964

Also Available from NCPCF

Other materials produced by the National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families:

Brochures

- It's not your fault the person you love uses porn
- Sex Abuse: Survival and Prevention
- Could Pornography be hurting your business?

Reports

- Protecting your family in Cyberspace
- Protecting yourself from Pornography's Subtle Effects
- The Community Library: Learning Center or Neighborhood Porn Store?

Mission

Protect children and families from the harms of pornography and its messages.

Vision

- *Empowering, coordinating and supporting the development of coalitions of lasting influence in local communities;*
- *Increasing public awareness of the availability and harm of pornography and its messages, particularly in the lives of children and youth;*
- *Educating and partnering with pastors and denominational leaders in developing an education program that will inform their constituency on the harms of pornography and how they can protect themselves and their families;*
- *Addressing the issue of Internet pornography in families, churches, schools, libraries and businesses through education development and promotion of appropriate technical solutions;*
- *Providing education, information and hope to those harmed by pornography and equipping others to provide effective tangible intervention and care;*
- *Supporting the enactment and enforcement, within the Constitution, of limitations on pornography.*



References

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- 2 Sexual Addiction: Questions and Answers (Golden Valley, Minn.: Golden Valley Health Center), 3.
- 3 Dr. Harry W. Schaumberg, *False Intimacy: Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress Publishing Group, 1992), 49.
- 4 Dr. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults & Children* (New York, New York: Morality in Media), 2.
- 5 Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1994).
- 6 Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Sexual Man: Masculinity Without Guilt* (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1994), 33.
- 7 Dr. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults & Children* (New York, New York: Morality in Media), 5; quoted from: Dr. Patrick Carnes, *Don't Call it Love: Recovery from Sexual Addictions* (New York, New York, Bantam Publishing Group, 1991).
- 8 Dr. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults & Children* (New York, New York: Morality in Media), 5; quoted from W.L. Marshall, *A Report on the Use of Pornography by Sexual Offenders* (Ottawa, Canada: Federal Department of Justice, 1983).
- 9 Dr. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults & Children* (New York, New York: Morality in Media), 5; quoted from G.G. Abel, *Use of Pornography and Erotica by Sex Offenders*, presented to U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, Houston, Texas, 1985.
- 10 National survey, quoted in *Sexual Addiction: Questions and Answers* (Golden Valley, Minn.: Golden Valley Health Center), 6-7.
- 11 USA Today, 2 February 1989, quoted in *Sexual Addiction: Is it the skeleton in your closet?* (Pleasant Hill, California: Impulse Treatment Center).
- 12 National survey, quoted in *Sexual Addiction: Questions and Answers* (Golden Valley, Minn.: Golden Valley Health Center), 6.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 Dr. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults & Children* (New York, New York: Morality in Media), 5.



NATIONAL COALITION
FOR THE PROTECTION OF
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

*Protecting Children
and Families
from the Harms of
Pornography and
its Messages*

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