

What You Need to Know About Porn Addiction

Plus, how to break the cycle

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While routinely viewing pornography may be beneficial for [self-exploration](#), sexual education, and even improving relations with your partner, making a habit of this practice—to the extent where pornography affects your daily life—could be problematic for your well-being. Studies estimate that between 86% and 96% of men regularly consume porn. Women consume only slightly less pornographic content.

At a Glance

While porn addiction isn't recognized as a diagnosable condition, it is similar in nature to a behavioral disorder. Much like other dependencies, porn addiction may have many adverse effects, including changes in the brain's reward center, intimacy issues, and a negative impact on your partner's self-esteem. Despite the stigmas attached to porn addiction, it is quite common among men and women alike and can be managed or professionally treated.

What Do You Mean By Porn Addiction?

Although porn addiction has yet to be recognized as a diagnosable condition, this behavior has been described as “problematic pornographic use.”

You may be addicted to pornographic material if you constantly crave erotic displays despite attempts to reduce your urges. You may also find other areas of life like work, academics, and social interactions limited by the constant need to consume porn. Watching porn may also take over any other interests.

If you're addicted to porn, you can be so overtaken by the need to consume porn that you may begin to watch it in public spaces like at work or on public transit.

Statistics on porn addiction vary by source, but one study estimated that porn addiction affects approximately 3 to 6% of adults. It is viewed more by young adults, with men viewing it more frequently than women. Use tends to decline with age.

Porn addiction is very likely a behavior disorder, one characterized as hypersexual. It is similar to other sexual behavior disorders like excessive masturbation and cybersex.

Press Play for Advice On Dealing With Porn Addiction

Hosted by therapist Amy Morin, LCSW, this episode of The Verywell Mind Podcast, featuring actor/tv host Terry Crews, shares how to navigate shame, trauma, and recover from porn addiction. Click below to listen now.

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How Do I Know If I Have a Porn Addiction?

To determine whether or not you have an unhealthy relationship with porn, excessive consumption is usually found to take up a lot of time, which can lead to a loss of control.

Porn addiction may also cause a strain in relationships with others. This behavior may manifest in the following ways:

- Excessive spending on pornographic material, sometimes at the expense of necessities
- Engagement in risky sexual behavior
- The use of porn to cope with difficult emotions like pain, anxiety, and sadness
- Consuming porn at risky times and moments
- Feeling anger at being advised to reduce porn consumption
- An inability to quit porn despite efforts to
- Experiencing shame following porn use, but being unable to stop the habit
- Progressing to more extreme forms of pornography to find pleasure
- Finding sexual intercourse to be less satisfying
- Hiding porn habits from sexual partners and others

Research suggests that the greatest predictors for porn use include being a young man, negative mood states, frequent internet use, religiousness, and sexual boredom.

What Causes Porn Addiction?

While some suggest that easy access to porn plays a part in porn addiction, it does not explain why some people have a problem with compulsive use, and others do not. Some factors that have been implicated in porn addiction include:

- **Brain differences:** Biological differences in the chemistry or structure of the brain may make some people more susceptible to behavioral and substance addictions.
- **Cultural factors:** Societal expectations about appearance, sex, and relationships can also play a part in porn use.
- **Stress or psychological problems:** Viewing pornography may sometimes become a form of escape or coping mechanism to manage life stress or other mental health issues.
- **Relationship problems:** Difficulties with intimate relationships may also lead some people to turn to porn to cope or to fulfill their sexual desires.

There is no clear consensus on what causes porn addiction, partly because not all researchers agree that viewing pornographic material constitutes an addiction. According to the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT), there is insufficient evidence that porn addiction is a mental health condition.

According to one study, believing you are addicted to porn contributes to distress more than the behavior itself. Others suggest that characterizing pornography use as an addiction plays a part in unhealthy attitudes about sex.

Effects of Porn Addiction

Because porn is so accessible, it's easy for someone to become dependent on erotic material.

Research also suggests that pornography use can lead to changes in the brain. In a study reviewing porn's addictive nature, subjects that consumed high amounts of erotic material were found to have increased brain reactions when presented with pornographic cues.

Like other addictions, viewing porn affects the brain's reward pathways, affecting a neurotransmitter called dopamine that plays a role in pleasure and cravings. This

reaction has also been observed when people with substance or gambling addictions are presented with addictive prompts.

Beyond changes in brain activity, however, excessive consumption of porn has also been found to have the following effects, outlined below.

Can Affect Intimacy Between Partners

While anyone can become addicted to pornography, this behavior is more noticeable in men—a trait that can be problematic for their partners.

In particular, it has been observed that men who frequently watch pornographic content tend to pull away emotionally from their significant others. These men tend to develop secretive traits, and may even fall into depressive states following their overconsumption of porn.

The type of porn being viewed may also contribute to dwindling intimacy between partners, as men have a tendency to consume less-affectionate forms of pornography.

It Can Affect Your Partner's Self-esteem

When a partner observes you drawing away physically, preferring instead to turn to porn—it can be a heavy blow to their self-esteem.

Questions around their abilities in bed, your interests, and what other areas they may be falling short might consume the significant other of a person with this hypersexual disorder.

Pornography Can Affect Satisfaction From Sex

When you're constantly viewing the bodies and intimate relations of others, it isn't uncommon to make comparisons. Soon, you may begin to consider your physical appearance and sexual abilities weaker, in contrast with professional sex workers.

Other times, this dissatisfaction may be targeted at your partner, who may measure themselves against the actors you watch.

People with porn addiction may also place an unhealthy amount of pressure on their performance during intercourse which significantly affects their sexual experience. While they're constantly watching people engage in sex, this person may find that their sex lives may feel less satisfying.

Can Affect Daily Functioning

Being glued to a screen displaying pornographic material can be very obstructive to your daily flow. It can hinder productivity in the workplace, at home, and in social settings.

The overwhelming need to watch others engage in intercourse can become more important than the meeting scheduled with a client, attending the doctor's appointment, or even taking much-needed time to relax and enjoy the day.

Porn Addiction May Encourage Mental Health Disorders

Having a heightened appetite for erotic material has been associated with anxiety disorders. In addition, this hypersexual disorder may also cause mood disorders and even substance abuse challenges.

While this is merely speculative, there have also been links drawn to excessive pornographic consumption and erectile plus other sexual dysfunctions.

How Do I Get Help for My Porn Addiction?

Because compulsive porn consumption is not an official disorder, treatment options for this condition are not fully established. However, to manage the effects, many options have been adopted.

Medication

To manage erotic dependence, naltrexone may be recommended as a treatment measure. This medication is typically used to manage alcohol dependence and opioid addiction.

Naltrexone may be able to halt both the craving for porn and the satisfaction derived from consuming it.

Therapy

Speaking to a mental health professional is one of the most effective ways to get negative behaviors under control. In addition, using techniques such as family therapy and relationship counseling can help navigate this condition's intricacies.

Professional guidance can help with wading through the feelings of guilt and compulsion with porn consumption. It can also help to manage the emotional and intimacy challenges caused by the habit.

Keep in Mind

Viewing porn excessively can easily be overlooked as a harmless way to indulge erotic urges. However, when these urges take a strong hold on free will, demanding that they be fulfilled irrespective of comfort, this can be harmful to your well-being.

On the bright side, despite how dominating porn may appear, porn addiction can be managed with determination and the right help from trusted professionals.

10 Sources

Verywell Mind uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

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