

Sexual Addiction

What is sexual addiction?

Sexual addiction is a pattern of sexual behaviors acted out even though it is harmful to you or to others. Examples may include:

- Masturbation
- Extramarital affairs
- Pornography
- Cyber sex, phone sex, or paying for prostitutes even though you are deep in debt
- Having many sex partners and thinking of them as just objects to be used

What is the cause?

The exact cause of this disorder is not known. It may be caused by differences in the brain or nervous system. Your brain makes natural chemicals that affect the way you think, feel, and act. The brain cells need the right balance of these chemicals to function normally. People with this disorder may have too little or too much of some of these chemicals in their brains. People with this disorder may have physical changes in their brains. These changes may mean that some parts of the brain are more active or less active than in other people.

It might also be related to things such as child abuse, lots of conflict in the family, or a family history of mental illness.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Being unable to stop thinking about sex
- Needing to have sex more and more often
- Trying and failing to control, cut back, or stop having sex
- Feeling restless or in a bad mood when trying to control sexual urges
- Having legal, job, or relationship problems because of sex

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your relationships, family history, and any substance abuse. Be honest. Your provider needs this information to help you find the right treatment. He or she will also ask about your symptoms, medical history and give you a physical exam. You may be referred to a mental health therapist for treatment.

How is it treated?

Both therapy and medicines may be used to treat this disorder. Therapy can help you:

- Change the way you think and feel, so that you are less likely to act on your urges.
- Help you understand how your victims feel.

Medicines may include hormones or medicines to correct the balance of chemicals in your brain. Both kinds of medicine help reduce sexual urges.

Treatment for sexual addiction is long-term and ongoing. Good options include self-help groups, support groups, or supervised treatment programs.

For more information, contact:

- Sex Addicts Anonymous
800-477-8191
<http://www.sexaa.org>
- Sexaholics Anonymous
866-424-8777
<http://www.sa.org>
- Sexual Compulsives Anonymous
800-977-HEAL
<http://www.sca-recovery.org>

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