Identifying, Preventing, and Treating Pornography Addiction

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What Is Porn Addiction?

To different people, pornography means very different things. One person may think pornography is as natural and common in life as breathing or walking. They feel this written or visual material should be viewed freely and openly alone or with others.

Another person might believe pornography is a terrible product created and distributed by devious characters with the goal of corrupting young minds towards a life of crime, sin, and amorality. These people do not believe anyone should consume any pornography in any form.

A third group might see pornography as something that is somewhat taboo but still safe, legal, and acceptable – as long as it is in moderation. This group would tell you that a little bit of porn is okay, but too much porn can be a problem.

Comparing Porn to Alcohol and Gambling

Thinking that something is okay in moderation but problematic in excess does not only apply to pornography. This view is common among many other substances and activities like:

- Food.
- Gambling.
- Alcohol and other legal substances.

People are quick to note that some alcohol, when consumed safely and responsibly, is fine and could even have some health benefits rather than risks. Gambling could be a great way to blow off some steam after a long week of work, and many people have amusing anecdotes about winning big or losing it all.

Everyone needs food to live, but some people develop tremendously negative relationships with food. For these people, food becomes something different than a means to fuel their body or a remedy for hunger, and it becomes the cause of and solution to many emotional frustrations.

The point here is that pornography's controversy is not that unusual. It is probably not as dangerous and negative as some people think it is, and it is probably not as safe and positive as other groups may think.

What Are the Effects of Porn? Benefits and Risks

Pornography, like food, alcohol, and gambling, is not a "cut and dry" topic. Because of this, the material has some benefits and risks.

People in favor of pornography will tell you that this content has its place in society as a way for people to explore

their sexuality and connect with their sexual partners in new and profound ways. Someone who struggles to form relationships in real life due to poor social skills, physical disabilities, or mental illnesses can utilize pornography as a way to avoid the loneliness of isolation. Pornography can be used as a tool to enrich and enhance lives and love.

Pornography has the power to create good, but as you know, powerful people, places, and things can be used for evil as well as good. Pornography has various risks.

Some people may be completely enthralled with pornography and enter a world where porn is the most important aspect of their life. The sun rises and sets around porn.

Worse, porn might begin to distort the relationships people have in real life. They may view something in pornography, believe this act is common, normal, or expected, and reenact it with their partner.

Perhaps, the behavior was unexpected and unwelcomed leading to hurt feelings, a damaged relationship, or a sex addiction. Some would argue that pornography is based on disrespect towards women, so men will be prone to treat their female partners in cruel ways.

Porn and Addiction

The most significant danger associated with porn is addiction. Whether it is linked to alcohol, drugs, gambling, or porn, addiction is a terribly unwanted and unwelcomed state of being.

With addiction, the person's entire life is centered around that specific substance or behavior. The heroin addict will wake up in the morning and only think about heroin, how to get heroin, how to pay for heroin, and where to do heroin.

The same is true for porn addiction. Part of the problem, though, is that:

- Porn is readily available with only a few clicks of the mouse or flicks on the touchscreen of a phone
- Porn is often free, which means it will not use or exhaust any of the person's resources
- Porn is legal – assuming it does not cross the line into inappropriate or illicit content – so the is no risk of serious repercussions for viewing the material or getting caught by the law
- Porn is widely accepted and viewed as an allowable outlet

With these factors in place, more people are exposed to pornography, and when more people are exposed, more people will struggle with moderation. Addiction will have the opportunity to take hold.

Not every person who views porn will become addicted to the material, just as not every person who uses alcohol or even heroin will become addicted. The people with the great risk of addiction are those who are using pornography to fulfill some type of need in their life.

If someone is chronically unhappy, depressed, anxious, or socially awkward, they may see porn as a path to happiness. For them, porn, which has the ability to be a positive coping skill, becomes nothing more than a negative coping skill. When used as a form of self-medication, pornography carries a greater risk of addiction.

Next page: Learning the signs and symptoms of a porn addiction, and the stages of porn addiction.

Signs of a Porn Addiction

Addictions to pornography can be very challenging to identify because viewing the material is usually a solitary activity. Someone in your life might have a serious problem with pornography if they:

- **Spend an excessive amount of time viewing porn.** This person might watch porn for many hours each

day.
- **Cannot function as they previously did because porn is consuming their life.** Rather than going to work or school, they are staying at home watching porn.
- **View porn in public.** These people may start viewing porn nonchalantly in bars, restaurants, or clubs without thinking this behavior breaks social norms.
- **Watch porn at work.** Usually, even a person engrossed in the life of porn can see viewing the material at work is never appropriate, so a person engaging in this behavior will be addicted to porn.
- **Choose porn over their real relationships**. An addicted person will begin to value their rituals and time with porn over real-life relationships.
- **Cannot see how porn is negatively affecting their life.** With a strong sense of denial, they may think you are making a big deal about nothing as they are convinced porn is not a problem.
- **Decrease their ability to take care of themselves.** People addicted to porn may put less energy toward eating well, exercising, hygiene, and sleep resulting in a decline in health and physical appearance.
- **Start viewing more illicit or deviant porn variations.** Some people with excessive porn viewing will tire of standard videos and seek the exhilaration of more violent, aggressive, or unusual stimulation.
- **Increase their secrecy.** To avoid having their behaviors detected by family, friends, and coworkers, porn addicts will be vague and secretive to hide their viewing habits.
- **Are often late or fail to follow through with plans completely.** Watching porn forces people to lose track of time, leading to decreased punctuality and increased forgetfulness.

Unfortunately, there is no standardized test to determine the presence or intensity of the pornography addiction. One must look at the above signs and decide for themselves if addiction is a problem for their loved one.

Ask questions of your loved one and their viewing habits, but just remember, the urge to minimize their behaviors in an attempt to maintain their patterns will skew their reports. You may need to take additional action to find out more about their use.

Am I Addicted to Porn? Self-Identifying a Porn Addiction

So, you have been watching porn. How do you know if you have crossed the line separating appropriate from inappropriate?

In many ways, noting your own porn addiction is even more challenging than discovering the addiction of others. When reviewing your symptoms, you must aim to be as open and honest as possible without unintentionally deceiving yourself.

You may have a porn addiction if you resemble any of the previously listed signs. You should also look out for:

- Feeling detached, disconnected, or bored with relationships in your life
- Strong feelings of guilt and shame that come during or immediately after your viewing
- Attempts to cut back or completely end your porn only to relapse and start viewing again
- Frequent arguments, lying, or deception with your loved ones regarding your porn use
- Making excuses or finding ways to justify your porn use to yourself or others in your life
- Spending tremendous amounts of money on pornography content or subscriptions
- Viewing or attempting to view anything that is illegal

Understandably, the process of identifying and accepting your addiction is complex. Because of this, it is always helpful to consult with an honest and trusted friend throughout the process.

Letting someone know your concerns can help to decrease the secrecy of the addiction and add and another perspective to help gather information. Your loved one may do a lot to confirm or deny pornography is a problem in your life.

The Stages of Porn Addiction

You might think something as serious as porn addiction will have a number of separate and easily identifiable stages, but this is rarely the case. Each person's journey from first use to complete addiction is individualistic and unique.

One person may take only a few weeks to become addicted to porn. What was first born out of curiosity quickly begins to take control of this person's thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Another person might take a much slower progression from first use to full-fledged addiction. Perhaps this person began watching pornography in his teen years but only began to experience symptoms of addiction after his divorce.

Since addictions are difficult to identify, there is always a fine line between behavior that people would consider "normal" and behaviors considered "abnormal." Comparing the behaviors of yourself or a loved one to others with porn addictions may only complicate matters.

Rather than getting overly focused on the stage of porn addiction, consider the impact porn is having on the person's life. If porn is an issue, it could mean addiction.

Next page: diagnosing porn addiction and porn addiction treatment options.

Diagnosising Porn Addiction

You might know someone who has every symptom of porn addiction just as you might know someone who has every symptom of Alzheimer's disease, but this information is meaningless without the diagnosis from a professional. The path to porn addiction treatment begins with a thorough evaluation from a mental health or addiction expert.

Diagnosis is challenging since symptoms and signs of addiction are often unclear, but a porn addiction diagnosis is especially complex since porn addiction is not currently an approved mental health diagnosis. Because of this, mental health experts will have to examine the symptoms and arrive at an appropriate diagnosis.

Possible diagnosable conditions include:

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- An impulse control disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Another addiction

Currently, gambling is the only repetitive behavior that can be officially diagnosed as an addiction. This recent advancement is significant because it opens the door to other addictions like online gaming and porn to be added in the future.

With porn addiction not currently an active diagnosis, tracking statistics becomes complicated, but experts know:

- 40 million adults in the U.S. view pornography on a regular basis
- 20 percent of all internet searches involve porn
- 33 percent of people viewing pornography are women
- 20 percent of men admit to watching porn while at work

Barriers to Porn Addiction Treatment

Unfortunately, many people resist and reject treatment for porn addiction due to high levels of shame and guilt associated with the condition. People fear judgment, criticism, and hostility from others based on their porn-related behaviors.

Much of this fear is realistic as porn viewing and porn addictions continue to be highly stigmatized. Certain people may assume that you are of poor moral quality if you have an addiction to porn. In some ways, it might be more comfortable for people to disclose an addiction to heroin than an addiction to porn.

Just because porn addiction is not currently a formalized diagnosis and there is the risk of judgment from other should not stop anyone from seeking or attending treatment. If porn addiction is having a negative influence on your life or the lives of your loved ones, seeking treatment for porn addiction can be the best decision.

Porn Addiction Treatment Options

The options for porn addiction treatment follow similar treatments for other addictions including alcohol and other drugs. The treatment always starts with a full assessment by a professional.

Evaluations can occur at your primary care physician's (PCP's) office, a mental health treatment facility, or an addiction treatment center. If you are uncomfortable with these options, you may want to call a national hotline like the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's helpline at 1-800-662-HELP.

During this evaluation, the expert will ask many questions related to:

- How long you have been watching porn?
- How frequently and intensely you watch porn?
- What you get out of watching porn – happiness, escape, etc.?
- How do others respond to your porn use?
- Negative mental health or physical health effects of porn.
- Current stressors and supports in your life.

Based on this evaluation, the professional will recommend a level of treatment that best meets your needs. The levels of treatment are numerous and include:

Inpatient/ Residential Porn Addiction Treatment.

Inpatient or residential treatments are all services provided to someone while they are living at the treatment facility. Inpatient/ residential setting require the person to leave their home and reduce contact with the outside world to focus exclusively on their recovery.

Inpatient settings may closely resemble hospitals, and residential treatments will appear homier and more comfortable. These intense services can last anywhere from a few days to many months, depending on the needs and symptoms of the individual.

Outpatient Porn Addiction Treatment

People with less intense symptoms or too many requirements at home may be appropriate for outpatient porn addiction treatments. Any treatment that allows patients to live and sleep at home while attending some scheduled professional treatments are referred to as outpatient.

Outpatient treatments can vary greatly with intense forms involving up to 30 hours per week and less intense forms including only one hour of treatment per month. Outpatient options are especially beneficial for people with strong social networks.

The best part about treatments for porn addiction is not having to choose just one form. Frequently, people will enter an inpatient facility at the beginning of treatment before stepping down to an outpatient setting for follow up care.

At this time, there are no medications specifically designed to assist in recovery from porn addiction, but people may benefit from antidepressants or antianxiety medications to improve qualities which indirectly affect addiction.

Scheduling an appointment to discuss medication options with a psychiatrist is a great way to start the process.

Finding Support for Porn Addiction

Outside of professional treatment, there are many options for people struggling with porn addiction. One option is to seek out a support group where people with similar addictions meet to discuss the condition and its impact on their lives.

These groups might be limited in your area, but many options for support groups exist online. A quick internet search might be all you need to connect to others with knowledge and advice to move your life forward.

The Bottom Line...

Pornography might not be a problem for everyone, but it might cause a problem in your life. If you are suffering from the impact of addiction, take the needed steps to find treatment for yourself or your loved one.