

# Sexual Addiction



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# What is Sexual Addiction?

Sexual Addiction differs from drug or alcohol addiction in that the addiction is to a behaviour rather than to a substance. Aside from that there are many similarities between Sexual Addiction and other addiction problems, including some of the symptoms, adverse consequences and treatments. Sexual Addiction typically involves a repetitive pattern of compulsive sexual thoughts, urges, and/or behaviours that are associated with significant personal distress or negative consequences to the person.

Although this disorder does not yet officially exist in a diagnostic manual, the following criteria have been suggested for Sexual Addiction:

- Recurrent and intense sexual fantasies, sexual urges and/or sexual behaviour.
- The time consumed by sexual fantasies, urges or behaviours repetitively interferes with other important (non-sexual) goals, activities and obligations like work or school.
- Frequently engaging in sexual fantasies, urges or behaviours in response to negative moods like anxiety, depression, boredom, or irritability.
- Frequently engaging in sexual fantasies, urges or behaviours in response to stressful life events.
- Several unsuccessful efforts to control or significantly reduce these sexual fantasies, urges or behaviours.
- Frequently engaging in sexual behaviours while disregarding risks of physical or emotional harm to self or others.
- It's important to note that while normal in moderation, the sexual fantasies, urges or behaviours become problematic when they cause significant distress to the person, or they have a negative impact on areas of the person's life (e.g. relationships, work, school)

## Are you struggling with Sexual Addiction?

Q: Do you spend most of your time thinking about, seeking out or having sex?

Q: When you reduce or stop sexual activity do you feel anxious, sad or guilty?

Q: Do you find that the time you spend thinking about or having sex gets in the way of school, work or friendships?  
If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you may be struggling with sexual addiction.

## What Behaviours are Associated with Sexual Addiction?

There are a variety of different behaviours that may or may not be associated with Sexual Addiction, including:

- Excessive masturbation
- Excessive use of pornography
- Multiple sexual partners, affairs, or one-night stands
- Excessive cybersex
- Excessive telephone sex
- Excessive visits to strip clubs

## How common is Sexual Addiction?

- It has been suggested that somewhere between 3 to 6% of people in the United States have this problem.
- The majority of individuals diagnosed with this problem are between the ages of 29-31.
- About 40-50% of those with Sexual Addiction are women, although statistics vary depending on the source.
- The majority of people with this problem are diagnosed with more than one addiction and it is common for people with this problem to also have another mental health problem such as an Eating Disorder or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

## What are some of the Consequences of Sexual Addiction?

Psychological consequences can include:

- Profound depression
- Chronic low self-esteem
- Shame
- Self-hatred
- Intense anxiety
- Moral conflict
- Fear of abandonment

- Distorted thinking
- Remorse
- Thoughts about suicide

## Health and physical consequences of sexual addictions can include:

- HIV infection
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Genital injury
- Unwanted pregnancies

## Other consequences of sexual addiction can include:

- Legal problems
- Financial problems
- Marital or other relationship problems
- Imprisonment
- Loss of employment
- Physical violence

## How is Sexual Addiction Treated?

Unlike some drug treatment programs, the goal of Sexual Addiction treatment may not be abstinence, but rather to stop the destructive sexual practices and to establish healthy sexual practices. Treatments may include psychotherapy, medication, and/or self-help groups.

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy is used to treat Sexual Addiction by targeting problematic thoughts and behaviours, improving self-esteem, and reducing anxiety and depression.

Pharmacological treatments may include Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI's) and Antiandrogens. The most common medications used are Cyproterone Acetate (CPA) and Medroxyprogesterone Acetate (MPA).

There are several organizations for people seeking treatment for sexual addiction—Sex Addicts Anonymous, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, and Sexaholics Anonymous to name a few. These organizations include support groups and 12-step recovery programs. Some organizations also incorporate a spiritual element in their treatment programs.