



# Sexual Addiction: A Most Intimate Concern Part I



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**S**exual addiction is very private and highly complicated. Successfully mastering any compelling problem starts with an awareness of what you are dealing with.

The term sexual addiction refers to the behavior of someone who has an unusually intense sex drive or obsession with sex. This person's private thoughts are excessively focused and pre-occupied with sexual images, impulses and needs. They may be somewhat engaged at work or home but it is often privately difficult to perform activities or to meaningfully engage in healthy interpersonal contacts.

People with sexual addictions may be willing to participate in high-risk behaviors and numerous forms of sexual activity cognizant of the potential for serious or even life-threatening consequences. Such expensive behaviors may cause erosion of relationships and work or school performance; legal and financial hardships and even permanent physical and mental disruption and/or disability.

Sexual addiction may lead to distorted thinking that helps to facilitate and rationalize behaviors caused by the sexual addic-

tion, including blaming others for one's actions. Denial is the cardinal feature in many addictions because its presence generally supports and makes excuses for the addictive behavior.

Occasionally, the sex addict progresses to activities that are illegal and may include voyeurism, exhibitionism, obscene phone calls, stalking with sexual intent, molestation and rape. However it is NOT accurate to interchange or make sex "addicts" synonymous with sex "offenders."

Sexual addiction behaviors vary widely. They can include unsafe sex, interactions with prostitutes, exhibitionism, excessive use of personal ads, pornography, phone or cyber-sex venues, compulsive self stimulation through masturbation, multiple anonymous partners or multiple extra-marital affairs. The degrees of disruption, consequence and underlying pathology also vary significantly depending on the specific addictive behavior(s) of choice.

One form of sexual addictive behavior does not necessarily exclude others occurring at the same time. There may also be progression from less complicated acts to more complicated and compulsive behaviors. The level of complexity is largely based on whether the acts are done alone or with others; for example masturbation versus having variable sexual contacts with many people compulsively and often.

Another factor that plays a compounding role in the complexity of sexual addictions is whether a person is in a relationship. If the partner of the sexually addicted person becomes aware of their partner's behavior, the existing relationship can be

seriously threatened. If there is a mutual desire to sustain the relationship during the addictive phase, therapeutic interventions vary greatly from the methods needed to help the negatively effected partner as well as the addicted partner simultaneously. An accurate and appropriate professional assess-



ment should yield a treatment plan that understands and specifies the individualized treatment modalities needed to address these difference concerns.

The origins of sexual addictions are likely from many sources such as genetics, environmental factors like nature and nurturing or the absence of such fulfillment; learned behaviors and eventually the misuse of one's natural sex drive. The beginnings of hormonal influences that lead to thoughts and acts of a sexual nature begin in early adolescence. Addictive factors may start as early as this phase of development or in adulthood. Once the addictive forces are established, a person may attempt to deny or resist them but they ultimately cannot. The series of negative outcome(s) are now primed for self-defeat or even self-destruction. Like other addictions, the need for immediate gratification on an impulse is so overwhelmingly appealing that a thoughtful analysis of the cost against the benefit is over-

looked and a longer term, often repetitive, regret is created.

Regrets can be numerous and enduring. They can cause forfeiture of precious aspects of the self such as loss of self-respect, self-worth, self-esteem, self-determination, impairment of meaningful relationships with partners, family, friends and colleagues, work and academic slippage, financial loss, physical harm and even death. As stated previously, even though the addicted person may be armed with intellectual awareness of all these concerns, the competing priority to act on in the behavior(s) of choice overrules this. The sexual addict attempts to conceal personal and private problems by using sexual acts to cope. Eventually they are not in charge but still accountable for their choices.

The most imperative decision the sex addict will make in their lifetime is cessation of these compulsive behaviors. Overcoming the addiction requires sufficient will, discipline, commitment, resources, time and professional care. A decision to follow through with this form of treatment may be life saving. The modalities utilized are multifaceted but the goal is to focus and break the compulsion and replace it with opportunities for genuine, spontaneous, loving intimacy and to eliminate all risk and harm

*Being alone in all this is scary and unnecessary. Treatment for attaining these life goals is available. We are glad to assess and provide professional care for you or your loved one for these debilitating concerns. Please contact our office*

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